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CORRESPONDENCE

Knowledge of Things Iranian

To the editors:

Shaul Bakhash was not a fair choice to review my book *Nest of Spies*, and his long piece does not do justice to my work ("Iran Amok," May 15). First, Bakhash has regarded me as an enemy for more than 20 years. During all this time he has gone out of his way to attack me through back-biting, rumor-mongering, and gossip. We first met in 1969, when I joined the daily *Kayhan International* in Tehran. Our views clashed over a wide range of issues: the Shah's reforms, the Vietnam War, the role of the CIA in Iran, the U.S.-Iranian entente, Zionism and Israel, etc.

Second, Bakhash, who has somehow managed to become an "Iran expert" in the United States, is an archetype of the kind of policy advice that I criticize in my book. He is one party to a long and heated debate regarding the deeper causes of the breakdown in Irano-American relations. The entire "Iran-watching" system on which he depends hinges on a number of misconceptions that I have dealt with in *Nest of Spies*.

Third, Bakhash, a naturalized American of Iraqi origin, never fully mastered the Persian language, and therefore has great difficulty in making full sense of much of what he reads. Being shut out of one side of the story, the Iranian side, he overemphasizes the importance of American scholars who understand Iran and have a good command of Persian.

Bakhash never tells your readers that I have been a close observer of Iranian-American relations for more than 20 years, and that I had direct access to many of the key players in the drama. Avoiding a serious discussion of the main themes of my book, he has concentrated his efforts on "demolishing" his old "enemy" by attacking the book's notes. *Nest of Spies* has some 680 footnotes. Bakhash has picked on a dozen of these. American readers would, in most cases, be unable to judge the fairness or accuracy of his claims.

Let me deal with a few of the examples that can be checked without much difficulty. Bakhash says that an article I quote from the *Washington Post* does not exist, but the article in question was written by Gary Sick, a former National Security aide, and published by the *Post*. Bakhash takes issue with my reference to one Mansour Rafizadeh, who has published a whole book titled *Witness* about his career as a double-agent. Bakhash makes me the author of a *Sunday Times* article that I did not write. Everyone knows that Shapour Bakhtiar, the Shah's last prime minister, claims dubious credit for a failed coup attempt in 1980 (he marks the occasion with solemn ceremonies every year), but Bakhash acts as if he never even heard of Bakhtiar's links with the alleged plotters. Bakhash, perhaps unknowingly, uses different editions of the books or pamphlets I cite to prove that a specific citation is either torn out of context or simply does not exist. He claims that a Tehran newspaper I cited was not published on the day I mentioned, deliberately forgetting that many Iranian papers bear the date of the day following their publication so as to appear "fresh" on arrival in the remoter regions of the country.

Bakhash is unhappy about two sets of my sources. First, there are those to which I had access before the revolution. A limited number of confidential reports were made available to the editors of leading newspapers, with restrictions about using the information. In addition, I was, on occasions, allowed to read special reports prepared for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the understanding that there would be no direct citations. Bakhash could not have seen any of them, but this does not mean that they did not exist. Second, Bakhash, who relies mainly on material printed in the United States, is somewhat dismissive of my sources within Iran. He wants me to give the full names of people who would be in mortal danger in Iran if their identities were revealed. But anyone even remotely familiar with Iran's violent politics would know that utmost discretion is required; investigative journalism depends on a judicious use of such sources.

I bear Bakhash no grudge. I feel sorry for him for being so full of hate as to drag 20-year-old quarrels into the New World as our old world continues to suffer from its largely self-inflicted wounds.

AMIR TAHERI
Bondy, France

Shaul Bakhash replies:

I provided numerous examples of Amir Taheri's sloppy and unreliable scholarship, which applied to his use of both English- and Persian-language sources and indicated a pattern of a specious scaffolding of scholarship that pervaded the whole book. Mr. Taheri does not address many of the examples that I noted of references to documents that cannot be found in the volumes or on the pages he cites; of articles that do not turn up in the newspapers to which he directs us; and of information attributed to books and documents that do not even cover the subject to which he refers. I also pointed to a number of instances where Taheri reads into documents information that is simply not there. In the few

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

A Weekly Journal of Opinion

JULY 17 & 24, 1989

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Scene from *Things To Come* (1934). © MGM/United Artists. Articles on pages 12, 14, and 18.

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FROM WASHINGTON

Flagellation

Many a bum show has been saved by the flag. —*George M. Cohan*

Amid the current hysteria an important ontological point has been overlooked: you can't burn the flag. It can't be done. *A* flag, yes. *The* flag, no. *The* flag, the American flag, is an abstraction—a certain arrangement of stars, stripes, and colors—that exists (*a*) in the realm of Platonic ideals and (*b*) in the minds and hearts of people. To say this is not to denigrate the flag; on the contrary, it is to place the flag where it belongs, in a higher realm of existence than the material. *A* flag, any particular flag, is merely a copy. You can no more destroy *the* flag by burning *a* flag than you can destroy the Constitution by burning a copy of the Constitution.

The flag, as long as it exists in human hearts, is fireproof. The Constitution, however, is more vulnerable. It can be desecrated quite effectively—by amending it in ways foreign to its spirit and hostile to its purposes. Members of Congress rushed to do just that in the wake of *Texas* v. *Johnson*. George Bush, in the first truly sickening act of demagoguery of his young presidency, has now put the impetus of his support behind them.

Have you read the actual Texas statute the Supreme Court ruled on? It makes it "a Class A misdemeanor" for anyone to "deface, damage, or otherwise physically mistreat [a state or national flag] in a way that the actor knows will seriously offend one or more persons likely to observe or discover his action." What's surprising is not that this bit of legislative flotsam was struck down, but that four of the nine justices deemed it consistent with the First Amendment.

All the opinions in this case are notable for their passion. The dissenters' passion is reserved mostly for the flag, the majority's mostly for the Constitution. The dissenters venerate the symbol; the majority venerates the thing symbolized. Both have emotion on their sides, but the majority has logic, too.

Chief Justice Rehnquist devotes many pages to explicating the special meaning of the flag. His dissent is studded with verse: four lines of Emerson's "Concord Hymn," the opening stanza of "The Star-Spangled Banner," two full pages of "Barbara Frietchie." He succeeds beautifully in making the point that the flag is a powerful symbol of a particular set of sentiments and ideas. Or, as Justice Stevens puts it, in a transcendently absurd passage I can't resist quoting:

> The message conveyed by some flags—the swastika, for example—may survive long after it has outlived its usefulness as a symbol of regimented unity in a particular nation.
>
> So it is with the American flag.

What the justice means is . . . well, never mind. But Rehnquist and Stevens want to have it both ways. The flag conveys a message that nothing else conveys, but burning a flag (in Rehnquist's words) "conveyed nothing that could not have been conveyed and was not conveyed just as forcefully in a dozen different ways." These assertions, Justice Brennan remarks in a footnote, "sit uneasily" next to each other. If flying the flag is symbolic speech, so is burning one; and speech, in this country, is supposed to be free.

Rehnquist argues that we outlaw "conduct that is regarded as evil and profoundly offensive to the majority of people—whether it be murder, embezzlement, pollution, or flag burning." We don't, however, outlaw murder, embezzlement, and pollution because they're offensive. We outlaw them because they inflict palpable harm on actual people. Flag burning merely offends, and it offends by what it says.

When the decision came down, I allowed myself to hope it would be the occasion for nothing worse than a harmless festival of hokum calculated to bring pleasure to the shades of Mencken and Sinclair Lewis. And that's how it was, the first day.

The inimitable Bob Dole rushed a wild, all-caps statement up to the Senate press gallery. It began this way:

> MAYBE THOSE WHO SIT IN IVORY TOWERS AGREE WITH THE SUPREME COURT. MAYBE, AS THE MAN WHO BURNED THE FLAG, MILLIONS OF PEOPLE HATE AMERICA, HATE THE FLAG. IF THEY DO, THEY OUGHT TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY. IF THEY DO NOT LIKE AMERICA, THAT'S FINE. GO FIND SOMETHING YOU DO LIKE. IF THEY DON'T LIKE OUR FLAG, GO FIND ONE YOU DO LIKE.

That was a paragraph to savor, especially the way the antecedents chased each other like enraged bees. Meanwhile, over on the House side, one rascal after another was having his say. The 15th to rise was Douglas Applegate, Democrat of Ohio, who, after proclaiming that it would be all right with the Court for his colleagues to rip down "the flag right here in this Chamber" and "defecate on it," shouted, "Are there any limitations? Are they going to allow fornication in Times Square at high noon?" As if on cue, up got Donald E. "Buz" Lukens, Republican (and underage girl fancier) of Ohio. "Mr. Speaker, what does it say to the world that Americans can now legally burn the flag? . . ."

The show got ugly the next day, when the texts of proposed amendments started filling the hoppers—amendments like this one, offered by 17 members of the House:

> SECTION 1. The misuse or desecration of the symbol, emblem, seal, or flag of the United States is not protected speech under the first amendment to the Constitution of the United States.
>
> SECTION 2. The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

And so on. An America capable of writing this sort of tripe into its Constitution would be a country at once less serious and less funny than the country we thought we were living in. And less free, too.

President Bush's role in all this is unusually contemptible. His first reaction was to say that while he regards flag burning as "dead wrong," he could understand why the Court decided as it did. That was the reasonable, moderate fellow one stupidly keeps hoping is the "real Bush." After a day's reflection—and lunch with Lee Atwater—Bush decided that "the importance of this issue compels me to call for a constitutional amendment."

If Bush has his way, the Bill of Rights will be amended for the first time in American history—and for what? Because of what danger? Flag burning is extremely rare, and, though offensive, essentially harmless. It has no "importance." It is not even an "issue," since no one, apart from a few isolated political cultists, is in favor of it. So what's going on?

The mystery vanishes when one recalls Bush's use last fall of the Pledge of Allegiance "issue." Now, if he has his way, the same cynical manipulation of patriotic symbols, as perfected by political consultants, is to be enshrined in the Constitution. Negative campaigning is to be raised to the level of a civic sacrament. The desecration of the flag, which is not a problem, is to be made the pretext for the desecration of what the flag represents. For George Bush, nice guy, the defilement of the Bill of Rights itself is just another tactic for narrow partisan gain. And it's hard to see, at this point, who's going to stop him.

HENDRIK HERTZBERG

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THE NEW REPUBLIC
JULY 17 & 24, 1989

BUSHWATERISM

What would it take to shame Lee Atwater into a few consecutive weeks of decency? Only a short while after the Republican National Committee chairman was roundly and rightly condemned for his role in fanning vicious rumors on Capitol Hill, his hand is visible in another, comparably despicable, Republican ploy. On June 26 President Bush had lunch with Atwater. Within hours the White House announced that Bush would try to "circumvent" the Supreme Court's recent ruling that burning the American flag is protected as an exercise of free speech. The next day the weapon of choice was announced: a constitutional amendment to ban flag burning. The intent is obviously to turn up the heat under any Democrats in Congress who have an expansive conception of civil liberties, to make them squirm, to show the voters that they're not patriots.

Are we reading too much into this? Is it possible that Atwater didn't strongly advocate this tack? (He claims he didn't.) Strictly speaking, yes. It's also possible that Atwater neglected to mention to Bush that "focus groups" hastily convened by the RNC had shown (surprise!) that flag burning is a potent issue. And certainly it's true that other masterful political strategists (Newt Gingrich, for example) are aggressively pushing the issue, too. But even if Atwater were entirely uninvolved in this latest hijacking of the flag, it would still be his legacy. He more than anyone else—except Bush himself—was responsible for turning patriotism into a partisan issue during the presidential campaign; he is the one who recommended that Bush get optimal mileage out of Michael Dukakis's veto of a state law making the Pledge of Allegiance mandatory in public schools.

The parallels between that case and the present one are exact: some Democrats have taken a principled constitutional stand that may strike coarse minds as unpatriotic, and Bush and Atwater are trying to paint them as traitors. "McCarthyism" is a term much overused in American politics these days, but Republican strategy may well have earned it by the time this nauseating spectacle is over. In the meantime, we can call it "Atwaterism" and define it as McCarthyism minus the outright lies. Or, better yet: "Bushwaterism." After all, the buck stops with Bush. Deserving as Lee Atwater is of scorn, to focus on him alone would be to step into the good cop/bad cop trap the Republicans keep setting.

We have Bushwaterism to thank for the Senate's cowardly 97-3 expression of "profound disappointment" in the Supreme Court's insistence that the Constitution protects even the most offensive forms of political expression. The three dissenters—Ted Kennedy, Howard Metzenbaum, Gordon Humphrey—deserve praise even though their votes reflect lack of political vulnerability as much as courage. And House Speaker Tom Foley is to be applauded for his early, frankly stated reservations about an anti-flag-burning amendment. If he performs the difficult feat of marshaling the troops on this issue, and defeats the amendment, he will have performed an act of leadership of archaic dimensions. The Democrats will almost certainly sustain political damage in the process, which is what will make this an act of leadership.

This is not the time to elaborate on why we believe that burning the American flag, offensive as it is, deserves the protection of the Constitution. We defended this view at length earlier this year (See "Waiving the Flag," January 23). Suffice it to say that with every Chinese who is shot for having briefly reveled in free-

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dom, we are all the more proud to live in a nation where the most vehement imaginable denunciation of the government cannot lead to a single day in prison. (Speaking of China: it is worth noting that some of the conservative commentators who lately have been insisting that only verbal utterances qualify as "speech" were only weeks ago embracing the Goddess of Democracy erected in Tiananmen Square as a symbol that speaks volumes about the aspirations of the Chinese people.) The same legislators who now profess to want an amendment banning flag burning are meanwhile insisting (correctly, we believe) on tougher sanctions against China—an example of the grotesque contradictions that Bushwaterism fosters. Give Bush credit, at least, for consistency: at the same time that he is playing footsie with a repressive regime in China, he is trying to make America a bit less free.

EXHIBITIONISM

Even as civil libertarians were rightly applauding the Supreme Court's flag-burning decision, some were complaining about government intrusion in artistic expression. The board of the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, which is heavily supported by federal funds, has just canceled a scheduled display of photographs after members of Congress started making noises about the photographs being offensive. The decision was denounced by the *New York Times* as "caving in" to "political intimidation," and by others as "censorship." The first judgment is in some sense correct. The second is not.

The photographs in question were taken by Robert Mapplethorpe, a homosexual artist who died of AIDS. You would not have to be a prude to be offended by them. One showed a man urinating into another man's mouth. Another featured the artist himself with a bullwhip handle embedded in his anus. Other sights included women engaged in cunnilingus and children in erotic poses.

Is it art? Is it indecent? Is it obscene? None of these is the question. The question is: Does it make sense to use taxpayer money to display prominently, in a widely visited museum, pictures that most taxpayers find extremely offensive? The answer is no, of course not. If you get away with it, all right: congratulations. But if you don't, please don't start screaming about freedom of speech. The Bill of Rights gives the government no obligation to subsidize any art, much less all art.

The success of a few congressmen in muscling the Corcoran into canceling the Mapplethorpe exhibit doesn't prevent those pictures from being shown elsewhere. And if government subsidy of museums ever becomes so pervasive that withdrawing funding *does* amount to censorship, then it will be time to scale back government's influence in the arts. Anyway, who has ever been under the illusion that government could subsidize the arts (or sciences) without imposing its prejudices on them? Recipients of NEH and NEA grants are hardly a representative sample of the artistic population. And undoubtedly more NEH and NEA money went to right-wing thinkers during the Reagan administration than during the Carter administration. The Corcoran flap is a reminder of the necessity of maintaining a strong, sheerly philanthropic sector of support for the arts.

It is a shame, in a way, that this debate has focused on the Mapplethorpe exhibit, laden, as it is, with the complicating overtone of homosexuality. Consider a piece of art, from another exhibit, that has also received government support: a photograph of a crucifix dipped in urine. Does anyone seriously argue that this is a worthy candidate for public subsidy? And consider the case last February in which the Art Institute of Chicago put an American flag on the floor and invited visitors to walk on it. In reaction, the state of Illinois withdrew funds from the primarily private Institute, and the U.S. Senate voted unanimously to make it illegal to display the American flag on the floor or ground. Odious though the Chicago display was, the Senate's reaction was wrong (see "Bushwaterism," above). But the state of Illinois had it right: taxpayers ought not be expected to support displays that do violence to deeply held community values.

It is this simple: America is now—and, God willing, will remain—a country in which you can deface the flag without fear of reprisal. But even in America, you cannot expect the government to pay you to do it.

NOTEBOOK

BY ANY OTHER NAME: The problems of baseball legend Pete Rose offer a welcome occasion to pontificate about conflict of interest. Rose, now manager of the Cincinnati Reds, allegedly placed bets on some games in which his team was involved. His defenders stress that he always bet that his team would win, so there's no reason to believe he intentionally lost a game. His critics concede this point, but stress that involvement with gamblers *looks* bad, taints major league baseball, and could, conceivably, get him under the thumb of bookies, who might then force him to throw a game. All of this misses an important point. By betting on some Reds games, but not on others, Rose established an actual conflict between his financial interests and the interests of the Reds. Suppose that, during a critical point in a game on which Rose hasn't bet, he's deciding whether to bring in his ace middle-inning reliever. Suppose also that he is betting on the following day's game, during which the need may (though it probably won't) arise for a well-rested middle-inning reliever. This prospect could lead Rose to keep his ace on the bench—to markedly decrease the Reds' chances of winning on Saturday in order to marginally increase their chances of win-

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— The New York Times

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— The London Times

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ning on Sunday. In short, as soon as Rose started betting on some games but not on others, his goal as bettor (to maximize income) diverged from his goal as manager (to win as many games as possible). That is an actual conflict of interest, as actual as the conflict that existed when James Baker, as treasury secretary, set debt-relief policies for Third World nations while owning stock in banks heavily exposed in those nations. If Rose has any excuse at all for allegedly betraying the trust of the fans, it is that this country has so often let politicians like Baker off with a slap on the wrist, and the media have so often abetted this injustice with confused pronouncements about the "appearance" of conflict of interest.

UGANDA BE KIDDING:

Uganda After Its Years of Terror: A New Stability

—*New York Times*, June 15, page A12

300 Rebels Reported Killed In Clash With Uganda Army

—same paper, same day, same page
(thanks to Brett Shapiro, Brooklyn, New York)

SAFE TO SAY:
"Rarely in modern history has a man of nearly 80 returned from obscure exile to seize power with the wholehearted backing of a nation unprepared for the excesses that were to follow." —*Washington Post*, June 8, in an article about the legacy of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini
(thanks to David L. Ballard, Marrakech, Morocco)

Do not keep this letter.

CHAIN OF FOOLS

By Joe Queenan

Dear Newt:
This paper has been sent to you for good luck. The original is in Fort Worth. It has been sent around the world nine (9) times. The luck has now been sent to you. You will receive good luck within four (4) days of receiving this letter, provided you send it back out. THIS IS NO JOKE. You will receive it in the mail.

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Please send no money. Please don't ignore this. IT WORKS!

Yours sincerely,
SAMUEL PIERCE

JOE QUEENAN is a writer at *Barron's*.

WHITE HOUSE WATCH

CAVING IN

By Fred Barnes

For better than two hours on June 26, two dozen conservatives sat around a conference table in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. President Bush dropped by for 20 minutes. He said he was in the "listening mode," but he answered a few questions anyway. No, he dislikes the day-care bill passed by the Senate, the Democratic bill. He wants tax credits, not a new spending program, for child care. Yes, he'd be glad to look at the World Freedom Foundation's scheme for guaranteeing a free election in Nicaragua next year. Bush's drop-by was sandwiched between appearances by John Sununu, the White House chief of staff, and Boyden Gray, Bush's legal counsel. Sununu said he's "scared stiff" the Democratic child-care legislation might be enacted over a Bush veto. Gray did not rule out a pardon for Oliver North at some point. Just before lunch, the conservatives departed, happy.

Sununu says Bush's overarching political strategy

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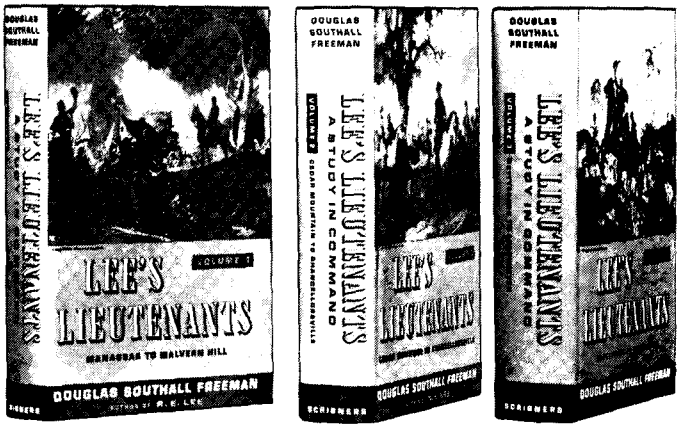

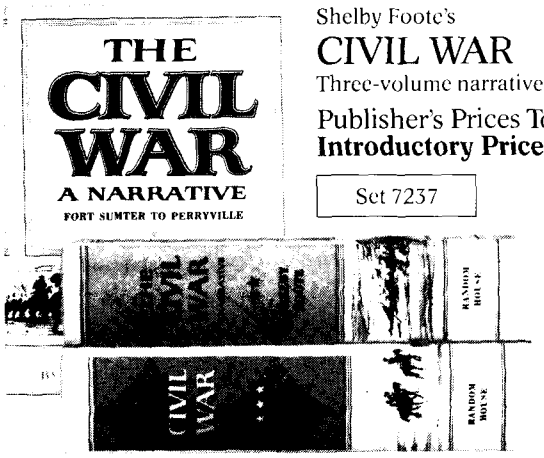

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consists of "pursuing a relatively conservative agenda while maintaining credibility all the way across the center." That description doesn't quite capture it. What Bush is really pursuing is the classic strategy of Republican presidents: grab the center while holding the right. It's working, particularly with conservatives. "So far, so good," says Brent Bozell of the Media Research Center, an invitee at the White House session. "I don't see anyone from a policy perspective who's up in arms." Allan Ryskind, editor of the conservative weekly *Human Events*, was back for his second briefing. He was satisfied, too. "There's nothing people can get angry about," he says. "Bush hasn't done anything horrendous."

The Bush strategy has two parts. First, the trick is to slip away from right-wing positions without alienating the right and causing a breach. Depending on the issue, that can be difficult. Second, Bush has to give conservatives the impression, true or not, that he thinks they're important and wants to hear their views. In achieving this, schmoozing is essential. On the day last February when Bush announced his Central American accord, which keeps the Nicaraguan *contras* alive but without military aid, a gang of conservatives was summoned for a White House briefing by Robert Gates, the deputy national security adviser. After his talk, Gates asked them to endorse the accord, and all but two did. Ryskind was one of the dissidents, having written that if the deal isn't a sellout, it at least "has the whiff of embalming fluid."

Bush and his aides, especially Sununu, know they "can't take conservatives for granted the way Reagan could," says Bozell. "Their goal is to keep us happy." Sununu works hard at this. He showed up on June 21 at a Capitol Hill dinner of about 30 conservative journalists hosted by R. Emmett Tyrrell of the *American Spectator*. Sununu, who can be testy and argumentative, kept his cool, even when peppered with hostile questions by columnist Robert Novak. The meeting was off-the-record, but Sununu assumed that anything controversial he said would leak. He was non-committal. Still, he got generally good marks from the journalists, few of them Bush fans.

Do Bush and Sununu really need to worry about the conservative movement? The answer is yes. True, conservatives can't deny Bush the Republican presidential nomination in 1992, but they can make life miserable for him in the meantime. Look what liberals did to Jimmy Carter when they judged him too centrist. A conservative infrastructure has grown up in Washington in the last two decades—think tanks, ideological groups, PACs, political consultants, lobbyists, etc.—and it can raise a ruckus. In fact, some conservatives eagerly await provocation by the president. Bush doesn't want conservative activists as his noisiest cheerleaders, but he doesn't want to drive them into opposition either. For a Republican, it's better to have no (or few) enemies on the right.

Sununu preaches pragmatism to conservatives. He believes that although politicians run for office on black-and-white issues, they have to govern in gray. From a conservative standpoint, he says, the policies adopted by Bush are the best that can be achieved. To conservatives gathered at the White House, he cited the Central American accord. The alternative, he said, was disbanding the *contras*. With the accord, the four democracies in the region have banded together to promote a free election in Nicaragua. And President Oscar Arias of Costa Rica has already declared that a free election isn't possible under current regulations in Nicaragua. If the administration were in futile pursuit of military aid for the *contras*, none of this would have happened, according to Sununu. He can be persuasive, and when he fails to be, says one conservative who attended the White House meeting, "he'll try to argue you down."

Even when Bush has drifted on issues such as gun control, he's drawn remarkably little criticism. He upset the National Rifle Association by banning imported AK-47s, but NRA protests were drowned out by those who zinged Bush for not outlawing domestically made assault rifles. His proposal for revising the Clean Air Act displeased the business community, but conservative activists scarcely batted an eye. At the White House meeting, several conservatives winced when Doug Wead, the president's official liaison to the right, said military action against Gen. Manuel Noriega of Panama was impossible because European allies might be offended. But who can blame Bush for not ousting Noriega after Reagan tried and failed? Conservatives don't expect Bush to outperform Reagan, which makes his job easier.

On child care, Bush is skating near the edge of a break with conservatives. Back in March he asked Congress to enact a new refundable tax credit to pay for day care or reward women who stay home with their kids. Conservatives love the Bush bill. It is based on four principles: choice for parents, no federal day-care standards, availability of different types of care, and federal assistance chiefly for poor families. The Bush bill went nowhere. In mid-June, Senate Republican leader Bob Dole and Senator Bob Packwood, the ranking GOP member of the Senate Finance Committee, put together a compromise bill, which the White House halfheartedly endorsed. To attract Packwood, Dole had to make benefits more generous for working mothers than those who stay at home. "That's the one thing that angered conservatives, the perception of unfair treatment of women working at home," says a White House official.

The new bill lost the backing of the Family Research Council, headed by Gary Bauer, who was Reagan's domestic policy adviser. But 44 Republican senators voted for it. So long as Bush sticks with Dole-Packwood, he'll be able to keep most conservatives on board. The trouble is, Dole-Packwood won't pass Congress. The Senate approved a Democratic measure conservatives dislike and, chances are, the House will pass something similar. Bush waffled at his June 27 press conference on

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whether he'd veto this. He doesn't want the reputation as the guy who blocked child-care legislation. But if he signs the Democratic bill, conservatives will go bonkers. "I would like to see what comes down here before I make further statements about what action I will take or won't take," he said. "I want to know the final piece of legislation that hits this desk." He won't know until the fall.

That's when he'll be tested on issues that matter most to conservatives: taxes, the Strategic Defense Initiative, the election in Nicaragua. Sununu says Bush will never agree to raising individual tax rates, but conservatives will be furious over any major tax hike as part of a 1991 budget deal. On SDI, Bush has said all the right things to conservatives, but it's unclear what his position will be in arms control talks. Reagan refused to use SDI as a bargaining chip. If Bush does, conservatives will flip. As for Bush's key test on Central America: that won't come until after the Sandinistas steal the election next February. What will Bush do then? Conservatives are likely to insist on renewed military aid to the *contras*.

For now, Bush is safe from conservative wrath. At the White House senior staff meeting on June 26, the idea of a constitutional amendment allowing prosecution of flag burners was raised. So was Representative Newt Gingrich's suggestion that Bush call a special session of Congress on July 4 to pass the amendment. The response at the meeting was tepid. At the meeting with conservatives two hours later, Jeff Eisenach, a former budget official in the Reagan White House who now is a Washington consultant, brought up the issue with Sununu. "This is a unique opportunity to create a grassroots Republican movement," he argued. Sununu merely listened. The next day Bush began his press conference by calling for a constitutional amendment to bar flag desecration. "I will uphold our precious right to dissent, but burning the flag goes too far," Bush declared. Eisenach was thrilled. "It was perfect," he said.

Future shock for fun and profit.

MACHINE DREAMS

By Howard Ullman

Assuming that the Japanese techno-industrial monolith is running smoothly, computers that can translate books, carry on casual conversations, and help us make tough daily decisions should be on display in American computer showrooms any day now. These are among the expectations that accompanied the ten-year "Fifth Generation" computer research project when Japan launched it at the beginning of this decade. *Time* envisaged machines that would "perform human-like reasoning: finding patterns, making assumptions, drawing inferences, reaching conclusions." The *Christian Science Monitor* reported, "The impact of these machines on everyday work is expected to rival the changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution a century ago."

But all projections paled by comparison with those of Edward Feigenbaum, the Stanford computer science professor who was the prime mover behind Fifth Generation hype. It was his book, *The Fifth Generation*, that had stirred *Time* and the *Christian Science Monitor* into a frenzy. The Fifth Generation machines, he wrote, not only would be smart, verbally fluent, and bilingual; they also would be "self-propelled vehicles of the intellect"—a "means of reshaping human thought at a level of complexity that no other intellectual tool—certainly not the written word, not any form of graphics we use now, or mathematics—has ever been able to provide."

Clearly, this called for an all-out mobilization of base nationalistic impulses. With the Fifth Generation, Feigenbaum warned, the Japanese would be poised to assume leadership in the information-processing industry, and thus bring to a "wimpish end" Luce's proud American century. As the United States sank to a second- or third-rate power, he predicted, Americans would feel economic and social pain. And, he added darkly, "Eventually, the pain might be political. The superior technology usually wins the war—whether the war is martial, entrepreneurial, or cultural." Get the picture? Just in case you don't: "Americans should mount a large-scale concentrated project of our own . . . not only is it in the national interest to do so, but it is essential to the national defense."

Today, eight years after Japan announced the main goals of its ten-year project, researchers at Japan's Institute for New Generation Computer Technology (ICOT) have reached none of them. There is no machine for translating between Japanese and English, no speech-activated typewriter, not even an optical scanner sophisticated enough to read Japanese written characters. There is no "personal inference machine"—indeed, no computer that comes markedly closer to human reason than the computers that existed when Feigenbaum wrote his book. A researcher at the Japanese External Trade Organization recently said of the Fifth Generation project: "It's dated. Forget about it." ICOT has revamped its goals; last year it announced that it would direct its energies toward building the "Friend 21"—a sort of amiable, souped-up Macintosh—and developing a computerized encyclopedia intended to lay the foundation for other smart programs.

Though Feigenbaum's years of laboriously publicizing the Fifth Generation may have wasted the time

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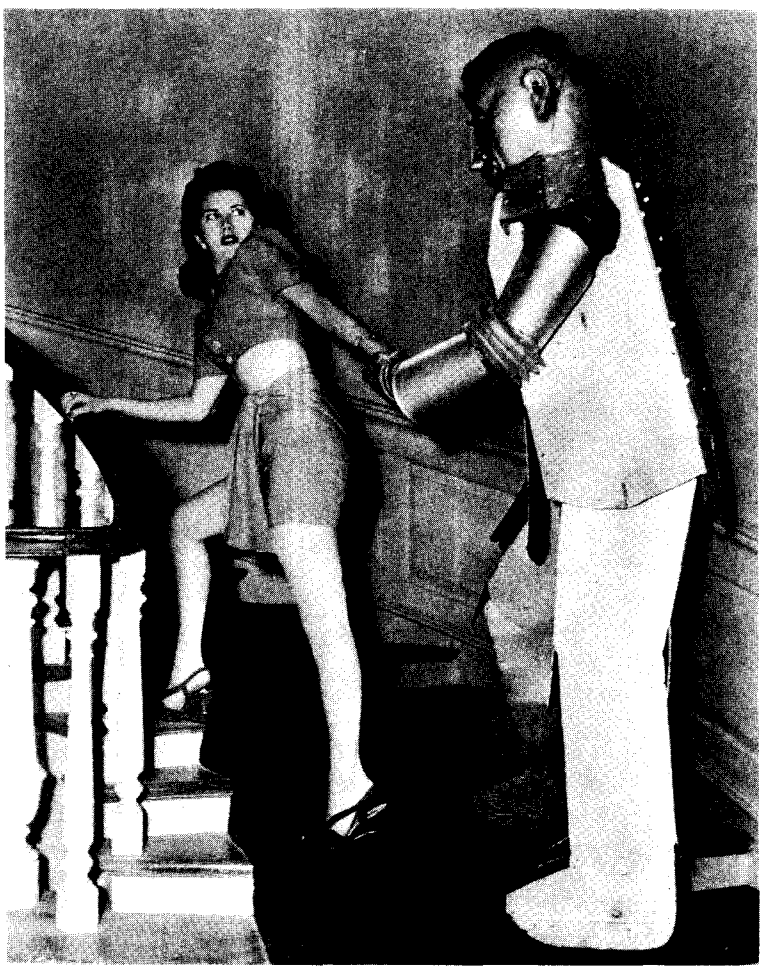
of many journalists and readers, that doesn't mean it was all for naught. After Japan announced the project in 1981, and Feigenbaum started writing his book and telling anyone who would listen about the Japanese peril, the Defense Department geared up its spending on research in artificial intelligence. And Feigenbaum, a long-standing recipient of Pentagon funding, got his share of the new money, as did various programs at Stanford University, where he is head of the heuristic programming project. You can say Feigenbaum was wrong, but you can't say he was stupid.

Feigenbaum is one of the pioneers in artificial intelligence. His major contribution came in the subfield of "expert systems," which, in fact, he more or less invented. Researchers who work on expert systems try to give computers "knowledge" about a particular subject—say, cardiology or prospecting—and then program in a set of rules that allows the computer to do sophisticated analysis: diagnose a patient's illness, for example, or find a likely source of underground oil. Early successes in this field (some medical diagnostic programs are more accurate than the average physician) are among the things that spurred the Japanese to launch the Fifth Generation program.



THE BETTMANN ARCHIVE (1941)

From the beginning, their goals were overly ambitious, even given ten years and $450 million (provided by Japanese companies and the government under the auspices of MITI, the Ministry of International Trade and Industry). They had reason to exaggerate their likely accomplishments—mainly to keep patrons in a generous mood. Although many in American computer science understood that the Japanese claims were overblown, Feigenbaum seems to have taken them at face value. Coming at a time when government officials and U.S. firms were already panicked by the profusion of Japanese VCRs and Sony Walkmans, his warnings found fertile ground. The more seriously the United States took the Japanese project, the more seriously the Japanese took themselves; Feigenbaum became something of a cult hero over there. And the more seriously the Japanese took themselves, the more seriously we took them. The result was what people in cybernetics call a positive feedback loop.

The Pentagon's response came largely from the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), which provides over half of federal funds for artificial intelligence research. (The National Science Foundation, the Navy, the Army, and NASA provide almost all the rest.) In 1983 DARPA set up a Strategic Computing Program to dish out $650 million over five years. Although the program was in the works before ICOT's inauguration, the Japanese announcement, along with Feigenbaum's lobbying efforts in Washington, Silicon Valley, and elsewhere, helped up the ante. A DARPA official recently conceded that "part of the decision to increase research investment in the United States may have been a reaction to some of the fanning [of Japanophobia] that was going on." Although there's always the tendency in science for researchers to play up their claims to get attention (witness fusion-in-a-bottle), he admitted that the hype over the Fifth Generation was more extreme than most.

Before 1983 Feigenbaum's heuristic programming project received about $1 million in DARPA funds each year; after the Strategic Computing program was established, that level roughly doubled. Feigenbaum also received a windfall from other Defense Department grants in the years after the Fifth Generation project started. In late 1982 he received $3.8 million from the Navy, and in 1983 he got a $3.4 million grant from the Department of Defense.

Private industry also was spurred to action. In 1983 more than a dozen American companies established the Microelectronics and Computer Technolo-

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gy Corporation in Austin, Texas, a consortium with a budget of about $70 million a year, including $15 million for the Alpha-Omega program, expressly devoted to countering the Japanese Fifth Generation. In 1984, the year after *The Fifth Generation* was published, General Motors shelled out $3 million for a 13 percent stake in the expert systems research company Feigenbaum had founded, Teknowledge. That year *Business Week* predicted that the market for expert systems would explode from $20 million to $2.5 billion by 1993. Maybe so, but we're more than halfway there and the number has only reached $600 million.

All of this, in turn, scared Europe to death. "The European reaction to Japan's Fifth Generation project has been violent," a European industry analyst told the *Washington Post* in 1984. "It is regarded there as a major threat." Western Europe put together a joint venture called Esprit and gave it a five-year, $1.3 billion budget. Britain, France, and West Germany established independent efforts as well. "It's like some sort of warfare," Brian Oakley, head of Britain's Alvey Program, told the *Post*. "It's strange that we should compete in this nationalistic way."

It was fun while it lasted. But today there are concerns among some computer scientists that Feigenbaum's hype actually may have hurt U.S. artificial intelligence research in the long run. By raising expectations to an unreasonable level, he helped guarantee disillusionment. Programmers have made real, albeit unspectacular, progress in designing more sophisticated programs, but some of the technologies that benefited most from the Fifth Generation hype have now seen their share of the government funding pie shrink.

An artificial intelligence technology called "neural nets" has begun to siphon government money away from expert systems, which were at the heart of Fifth Generation research. Stanford has turned out a lot of expert-system-oriented graduate students, and has a lot of intellectual capital tied up in the idea. So if the government moves expert systems research all the way to the back burner, then Stanford, not to mention Feigenbaum, stands to lose a lot. And that could happen, if "neural nets"—which is, after all, a catchy term—catches on the way "Fifth Generation" did a few years ago. There are signs that it will: at a recent congressional hearing, a DARPA official said that neural nets were more important to the United States than the atom bomb.

Not to worry, though. If the government well dries up, Feigenbaum can always spend more time in the private sector. His latest book, written with Pamela McCorduck (who co-authored *The Fifth Generation*) and H. Penny Nii, is called *The Rise of the Expert Company: How Visionary Companies Are Using Artificial Intelligence to Achieve Higher Productivity and Profits*. Expert systems, the authors say, can increase productivity by more than a factor of ten. Indeed, the authors were "amazed by the size of some of the savings realized."

The book also contains a tortured explanation of why the Fifth Generation sank without a trace. "The Fifth Generation project is widely admired, not necessarily for its technical achievements but for its boldness, its pursuit of innovation, its enthusiasm, and its drive—as we heard it put, 'the spirit of ICOT.' There is gratitude that [Japan] got the ball rolling in applied artificial intelligence. The enthusiasm is infectious, but ICOT technology is not—yet. Those companies, even ICOT member companies, which are having successes with knowledge technology are making little or no direct use of the ICOT research results." That's probably good news, because "in the international competitive environment, the early adopters [of expert systems] will not easily be displaced by latecomers. The competitive opportunity presents itself now. When will another, as widely useful and powerful as this, come along?" Could be years.

Insert coin, press play.

EAT HOT LEAD, R2D2

By John Adam

Military men are thinking seriously about the 21st century. They hold brainstorming sessions, attend symposia, and play war games on computers. Then, when they're done, they publish reports with names like *Report of the Ship Operational Characteristics Study on the Operational Characteristics of the Surface Combatant of the Year 2010*. This study, published last year by the Chief of Naval Operations, discusses everything from laser weapons, torpedo-killing drones, and microwave beam guns to on-board cash machines and phones with call waiting. And, also: "There is no reason that shipboard heads should require the amount of maintenance and cleaning man-hours that they consume today. Modular heads should be designed without corners or hard-to-clean areas. Adequate ventilation must be provided."

The Air Force, in its Project Forecast II report, recommends giving pilots tiny thinking machines inside their helmets. These "electronic associates" will "allow the pilot to aim and fire weapons or to activate other cockpit functions simply by looking or talking." The report offers dozens of other initiatives "guaranteeing continued technological supremacy over any potential adversary," including the possible stationing of robots on the moon.

The Pentagon's prophesies haven't always been accu-

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rate. Just five years ago, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency predicted that by 1990 wheeled robots would be cruising at 40 miles per hour across rough terrain, choosing their targets along the way. This program has since been quietly canceled. Still, regardless of whether current initiatives pan out, it is possible to perceive some general trends in the conduct of war and to sort out the more plausible of the visionary claims.

Weapons are likely to keep getting faster, more accurate, smaller, and smarter. ("Smart" missiles will eventually give way to "brilliant" missiles that distinguish primary targets like tanks from secondary ones like trucks.) Soldiers will be increasingly distant from the enemy, playing less the role of hands-on operator and more the role of executive administrator. Thus, although truly autonomous land robots are no longer expected in the next few years, working prototypes exist for robotic land vehicles remotely controlled by human overseers, who monitor their progress by video. The Navy and Air Force have a variety of remote-controlled sea-borne and air-borne unmanned vehicles, and are testing genuinely autonomous robotic vehicles.

Harder to discern than the general trends of military technology is whether they are cause for excitement. There are those who believe that they are—that the growing capacity for electronic surveillance and defensive technology will have a generally stabilizing effect, making attack less likely to pay off. This sentiment is found in Freeman Dyson's *Weapons and Hope*. And a variant of it has been advanced by some supporters of the Strategic Defense Initiative, such as Lowell Wood at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. According to Wood, offensive nuclear missiles are relatively mature systems, while strategic defensive weaponry has much room for innovation—and, besides, can be made more cheaply because it does not rely on such expensive materials as uranium and plutonium.

It would be nice if things were this simple. But there are at least two complications. The first is that, in the realm of nuclear war, defensive capabilities aren't necessarily a good thing; anything that might allow one side to survive nuclear retaliation makes nuclear war more thinkable, which, according to classic deterrence theory (specifically, mutual vulnerability doctrine), is the first step toward the brink. In the conventional arms arena a strong defense may be stabilizing. (The shoulder-fired stinger anti-aircraft missile, which is widely credited with tipping the Afghanistan war in favor of the defenders, could in the future deter an aggressor.) Unfortunately, technological advances alone won't ensure the predominance of defensive weapons. On the contrary: most of the weapons technologies that are emerging have a persistent ambiguity. The most benign defensive technologies have their unfortunate, destabilizing effects, and some of the most vicious offensive technologies have their brighter sides.

Consider the realm of waves and particles. Since World War I, soldiers have reached beyond the small sliver of the electromagnetic spectrum that they can see or hear unaided. They first used radio for communications, then in World War II they used radar for early warning and then targeting. Now more of the energy spectrum is being exploited to extend human ears and eyes even further. There is little doubt that infrared and ultraviolet waves will play a greater role in tomorrow's battlefield.

To look at the up side: this will open new opportunities for arms control monitoring. Remote examination of smokestack emissions, for example, might locate chemical weapons production plants. (Another possible effect of surveillance along novel wavelengths could be to negate some of the advantages of American stealth technology. As electronic eyes are looking over greater swaths of the spectrum, it becomes more difficult to conceal all the telltale signatures of an airplane, or a tank.) But this heightened scrutiny could itself be defeated by high-tech countermeasures. Moreover, the same technology can be used to enhance targeting, and thus aid a conventional or even nuclear assault. In fact, the electromagnetic spectrum can be an offensive arsenal in itself. High-power microwave weapons and high-energy lasers—even X-ray and gamma-ray lasers for outer space—are being researched in U.S. and Soviet labs. The current view that laser, microwave, and particle beam weapons could be fielded within 20 years is probably not off by much.

These weapons, to be sure, will themselves have a positive side: they will tend to be used for defensive purposes. Unlike missiles, they cannot shoot beyond the horizon or hilltop. Rather, lasers would be well suited to blinding the electronic eyes of incoming missiles and planes. (A West German company is already developing such an anti-aircraft weapon.) Given this defensive inclination, energy beam weapons might be deemed a basically good thing were it not for one other use: they can blind or damage surveillance satellites, which, when used to warn against attack or to verify arms accords, are stabilizing. Similarly, much of the "defensive" weaponry for SDI would have greater ability to kill satellites, which are sitting ducks, than hurtling missiles.

Robotics technology is similarly two-sided. The U.S. Army's Teleoperated Mobile All-Purpose Platforms—prototypes of which are being tested at Fort Bragg—have great potential as a defensive, stabilizing force; they can fire missiles at tanks and other targets, but, because they move slowly and are tethered to a human commander by optical fiber, they are more likely to be used in defense than in assault. Because they are immune to lethal germs, nuclear radiation, and poison gas (not to mention fatigue and cowardice), they might well make an enemy commander think twice before attacking. But less beneficent are the small cigar-shaped underwater robots being developed for the U.S. Navy. One potential mission is to follow Soviet ballistic missile submarines silently, much as a remora attaches to its host shark.

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If this research succeeds and the swimming weapons are deployed by one or by both superpowers, international security could suffer. The hitherto most invulnerable part of the nuclear deterrent triad of land-, sea-, and air-based missiles would be jeopardized.

Not only can the inexorable march of technology not be counted on to make the world a safer place; it could turn out that future technologies will be actively destabilizing, especially if breakthroughs come so frequently that one side suddenly enjoys pre-eminence. (There will be an endless hide-and-seek game, for example, between stealth technologies and detection technologies.) So if the world's alignment of forces is going to become more stable, this will have to happen through negotiations aimed at raising the ratio of defensive to offensive weapons. This could involve constraints on the number of offensive systems, but not on defensive systems. Or it could involve the international sharing of defensive systems. Military men cringed when Ronald Reagan suggested this in regard to Star Wars technology, but with appropriate controls, the technology transfer could be beneficial to both sides. For example, the United States could offer to sell design and production rights for defensive robots to the Soviet Union, assuming the technology was not too easily converted to offensive use. (If such robots were unilaterally deployed, they could upset a negotiated balance of arms in Europe; if one side could do with one soldier what another does with five, troop limits would not be very meaningful.)

SCENE FROM THE U.S. ARMY EXHIBITION "ARMY MOBILITY LOOKS TO THE FUTURE," 1961

It would be wrong to assume that technology will make the enforcement of future treaties easier. Though growth in the number of surveillance satellites, and in their powers, will give us better coverage of every Soviet square mile, it will increasingly be the case that potent weapons can be stored within a few square feet. (Already nuclear-tipped cruise missiles are small enough to make treaty enforcement difficult.) This means that on-site verification will have to be part of any effective treaty. And such verification will have to be increasingly intrusive and frequent. Smaller and smaller factories and warehouses will be under suspicion; and through flexible manufacturing technology, a factory that is producing cars one month can be producing cruise missiles the next. A further complication is political. If the cold war continues to wind down, and, as some contend, the world becomes increasingly multipolar, arms negotiations may become harder to conclude because of the sheer number of parties involved.

But recent developments in arms control negotiations offer some hope. The East and West are scrapping all of their destabilizing medium-range nuclear missiles—thousands of them, most with Cyrillic labels. And there is ongoing progress in conventional arms negotiations. There is talk of not just limiting the number of soldiers and tanks per side, but of confining their placement within zones farther from borders.

These days, soldiers can have great fun imagining they are fighting, whether taking part in computer simulations, NATO exercises, or mock skirmishes along the Soviet border. Occasionally, it ceases to be a game, and there are actual encounters with the enemy—in, say, airspace near Libya. But even actual aggression must seem surreal to the modern fighters. Technology has depersonalized combat to such an extent that distinctions blur between actual battle and a video game. A blip is a blip. In the future, battle will resemble games even more, as human participants recede farther from the enemy. It seems only fair then, that the world should adopt some rules of big-league sports, where teams of equal numbers confront each other within artificial confines under precise regulations that keep the action from getting out of hand.

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The gene is out of the bottle.

GENES 'R' US

By William Saletan

It's hard to predict where genetic engineering is heading, but it's easy to predict what different scientists will say about where it's heading. The key is the fax test. Biotechnology enthusiasts fax to you. Ring them up, and they send corporate reports, congressional testimony, and biographical information on their CEOs. They set up conference calls so you can bask in the visions of senior executives. "Augmenting intelligence may prove to be feasible within the next 30 to 40 years," says Chuck Tyler, vice president for new ventures at Applied Biosystems. And, as for mortality: "Perhaps Ponce de León was just three or four centuries too early."

The less visionary scientists also communicate by fax, but you do the sending. Want to talk to a Nobel Prize-winning molecular biologist? Send your interview request by fax. Then maybe you'll get permission to fax the questions. Not that it's worth the trouble; the forecast will, at its most venturesome, amount to "time will tell."

These cautious types tend to be found at the National Institutes of Health's Human Genome Project, a massive effort to decipher the three-billion-digit genetic sequence that encodes the recipe for making a human being. For biotech companies, bullishness is good business, but for the scientists who are spending $3 billion in taxpayer money on the Genome Project, speculation about messing around with human nature and society can only bring sorrow. "It's critical that people appreciate the limits of what can be done, so that their fears don't intrude on the benefits that could come out of genetic research," says Dr. Nancy Wexler, a psychologist and hereditary disease specialist who sits on the Genome Project's advisory board.

There's a third contingent in the debate over biotechnology's future: the Rifkinites. When people like Wexler downplay the issues that lie ahead, people like Andrew Kimbrell, policy director of Jeremy Rifkin's biotechnology watchdog group, the Foundation on Emerging Technologies, say, "That's disingenuous." Kimbrell says, "We're beginning to identify genetic material that gives us a predisposition to any number of mental and emotional disorders. You could see genetic engineering of human beings from the fetal level on up." For example, "If they found that your child who's in kindergarten was predisposed to shyness, they would alter that child not to be shy.... These technologies have an enormously eugenic potential."

It is an odd spectacle. From the political left—which historically has vilified anyone who suggested that genes had much to do with behavior—comes the insistence that genes have lots to do with behavior. Meanwhile, molecular biologists and geneticists are insisting that molecular biology and genes aren't too consequential; can-do scientists who just convinced the nation to fork over $3 billion to decode the recipe for humankind are stressing all the things that can't be done with the recipe.

The economic and scientific forces that may be propelling us toward a bio-talent industry, and a host of associated large policy questions, are already on display in more conventional markets. In agriculture, biotech firms and universities are working on everything from tougher tomatoes to leaner pigs to plants that can make their own pesticides and heal their own wounds. Companies say that within the next decade they'll learn how to engineer the nutritional content of food. In ten years, "All the major commodities, both animal and plant, will be engineered," promises Dr. Arnold Foudin, who tracks private ventures for the Department of Agriculture's biotech division. You hate oats but want the health boost of oat bran? "There's no reason on earth we can't put it into other crops," he says.

Private researchers also boast of genetically altered microorganisms that can devour organic wastes in groundwater and landfills—and that come complete with a self-destruct mechanism to prevent the Frankenstein problem. "The only carbon they can eat is the carbon you want destroyed," says Dr. Leonard Guarraia, Monsanto's director of science and technology policy. "When it's gone, they're gone." Biotech wizards also promise to displace the known hazards of chemical pesticides with organic plant "vaccines."

The Rifkinites have gotten most of their publicity so far by lobbying against such interventions—the engineering of single-cell forms of life. But this cause may

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be waning. Though mainstream scientists initially shared some of the concern, they seem little troubled these days about mutant organic pesticides running amok. Unless some such catastrophe strikes during the next few years, as genetic engineering heads out of the lab and into everyday life, Rifkin will get little reward for playing this theme. Attention will turn to the next set of big questions: ones directly involving human beings.

The initial round of human genetic therapies is expected in medicine. First come cures for single-gene disorders, such as cystic fibrosis, muscular dystrophy, sickle cell anemia, kidney disease, and Huntington's disease. In five years: insertion of therapeutic genes into human cancer patients. In ten years: genetic therapies for a wide variety of cancers. In 20 years: cures for autoimmune disorders and rheumatoid arthritis. In 40 to 50 years: cures for diabetes, Alzheimer's, and multiple sclerosis. Then, at some point, we're expected to confront a realm of cancers, heart disease, arthritis, and mental disorders that, while genetically treatable, involve so many genetic or environmental variables that a sure-fire genetic cure is impossible.

It's hard to decide how seriously to take these sunny forecasts, since scientists both in and out of the business sector find it in their interests to make them. In any event, the really big issues will come in the next generation of DNA technology. If the frontiers of genetic engineering can advance from one-gene to three-gene traits within a few years, what stands in the way of discovering the larger gene combinations that influence height, weight, and skin color? For that matter, won't we eventually be able to identify the genetic roots of intelligence, ambition, courage, and altruism? And if so, whose children will be permitted to benefit?

Ask someone affiliated with the Human Genome Project about these spooky future technologies, and they'll probably dismiss the question by saying that environmental factors overshadow the influence of genes. "If you deprive a child of all sensory input, it can't do anything when it grows up," notes David Botstein, a vice president at Genentech and a board member of the Genome Project. Or, to take a slightly less extreme case: if you have the same genes as Einstein but you grow up in Okarche, Oklahoma, you may not do too well on your SATs. This point is so firmly embedded in the repertoire of cautious types that they have developed pet metaphors to express it. Here's Botstein's: "The brain is the hardware, and education—in fact, arguably all experience—is the software. Now, the question is, can I increase the ability of an IBM-PC to do word processing by giving it the brains of a Cray?" Here's Wexler's: "All kinds of people take the same scale and combine the notes in incredibly different ways," she says. "You put a C next to an A or a B, and you get a Bach chord or a Rolling Stones chord."

This all sounds nice—and, for the most part, it is true; the expression of genes (even genes as simple as the ones for skin pigmentation) is exquisitely sensitive to the environment. But this doesn't mean that it is *in principle* impossible to meaningfully alter behavioral patterns by manipulating the genes. Indeed, very simple reasoning leads to the conclusion that, in principle, it almost certainly is possible to affect intelligence, aggression, and other traits through genetic engineering.

Just about all psychometricians now agree that genetic differences underlie some substantial fraction of the differences in intelligence—as crudely measured by, say, IQ scores—among people. Granted, this consensus says nothing for certain about individual cases. The difference in intelligence between Sylvester Stallone and Stephen Hawking is, for all we know, entirely due to the environment. And, granted, this consensus provides no guarantee about the ultimate manifestation of genetic differences between two people. Even if part of the difference is genetic, that does not mean that anyone with Hawking's genes would have wound up with his mind; the role of the environment in shaping the mind is too critical. What *is* safe to say is this: some babies have constellations of genes that *are more likely* to lead to genius than other babies' constellations of genes. And growing evidence—some from studies of identical twins reared apart—suggests that the same may go for courage, altruism, moodiness, etc. If these constellations of genes, along with their statistical implications for behavior, can ever be isolated, that will ensure decades' worth of articles for bioethics journals. For these statistical correlations will no doubt entice more than a few expectant parents into an intense interest in genetic engineering.

Actually, even if observed differences in intellectual and emotional traits had no genetic underpinning, there would be reason to believe genetic engineering is in principle possible. After all, no scientist denies that evolution, by recombining genes, has raised the average intelligence of the population (or, more accurately, the average potential for intelligence). And there is no reason to assume that this process of recombination has reached any fundamental limit. It is strange to hear government scientists, many of them steeped in the study of how natural selection has manipulated the genes to create the human brain, acting as if there were no reason to believe that manipulating the genes could have any effect on the human brain.

Once these theoretical questions are settled, the questions of practice arise: Will science ever be able to *specify* genes that make a person more likely to be smart, ambitious, emotionally stable, etc.? Here complexity rears its ugly head. There are three billion genes in the human genome, and they can interact in astoundingly diverse ways. To take the simplest case: children of dwarves who inherit one normal gene and one dwarf gene turn out more normal than those who inherit two dwarf genes. So a child who inherits only one gene for Huntington's

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disease will be better off than one who inherits two bad genes, right? Wrong. Each case is different. This kind of variation may seriously limit our ability to extrapolate from one gene-trait relationship to another, and vastly complicate attempts to alter whole complexes of genes to predictable effect.

The three billion genes in the genome—many of which affect the expression of others—are nothing compared to the multiplicity of environmental factors that affect genetic expression. Keeping track of the resulting chains of causality is probably hopeless. Granted, the same exact collision of genetic and environmental factors, if replayed, would produce the same result. But even if you know all of the factors involved, you couldn't predict the outcome unless you had seen the same situation play out before. That's unlikely, and arguably impossible. Wait, it gets worse. The central factor in every collision, the person, is a function not just of three billion genes but also of a history of gene-environment collisions.

Again: none of this means that some sets of genes aren't more likely to get you into Harvard than other sets. But it does say that no set can guarantee you a slot there. And it says, further, that uncovering any statistical correlations between genes and the chances of getting into Harvard is going to be a mammoth task. Here's a likely scenario. Researchers looking for genes that predispose people toward, say, anti-social behavior will find a fuzzy pattern involving a dozen genes and suggest there's a causal link. Other scientists will challenge their hypothesis, test it with other data, declare it falsified, and accuse the original researchers of failing to consider the influence of such factors as education, family situation, and religious upbringing. If you liked watching scientists argue about what happens inside a jar, you'll love watching them argue about what happens outside.

But adroit entrepreneurs and anxious parents won't wait for the last word on smartness genes. Once word gets out about a study linking certain genes to, say, a 160-point average difference in SAT scores, the same folks who send their kids to Princeton Review to give them an "equal chance" will start to think about how unfair it is that their offspring are genetically disadvantaged.

The ensuing problems are obvious. Such gene therapy, if it became available, would at first be so expensive that only the rich could afford it. Even the purest free marketeer would have to think twice about that. And if society chooses not to let the market allocate this resource, should we pay to make gene therapy available to everyone, or should we ban it? (And will Congress ban it if Japan doesn't?) Before you decide, answer these questions: Certainly parents should have access to genetic therapies for alleviating serious diseases, right? Including mental retardation? And if that's fair game, then how about below-average intelligence? Similarly: Certainly parents should be allowed to head off severe manic-depressive illness (the genetic roots of some variants of this are now coming to light). So what's wrong with making your child less prone to more subtle mood swings? To playground violence? To temper tantrums?

Another frontier in eugenics is the question of programming immortality—or, at least, holding mortality at bay. Roughly speaking, geneticists tend to lean toward either the mechanical model or the genetic model of aging. The mechanical view: "Aging is simply exposure to living for years. There's a certain wear and tear." The genetic view: "Aging is encoded in the genes, it's part of the basic biology of the organism. It's not a question of the parts wearing out. It's programmed." Then there is the middle ground, occupied by Dr. George Martin, a genetic specialist on aging. Ultimately, Martin believes aging is largely genetic, but very complex, with many genes involved. If so, the good news is that genetic engineering can probably prevent deaths due to pathologically early aging, perhaps fairly soon. The bad news is that it will be far more difficult, perhaps impossible, to postpone significantly aging and death in general.

The ethical questions that may grow out of all this 30 or 40 years down the road will be colored in more ways than one by the question of the complexity of genetic causation. Rifkin has been talking for years about the ethics of parents choosing one trait over its alternatives; tall over short, for example, or white over black. But choices may also involve deciding whether some whole categories of traits are more important than others. The reason is that a single gene or group of genes can exert simultaneous effects on more than one trait. The same gene that contributes to your hooked nose may reduce your chances of tooth decay, for all we know, or even limit your fluency in foreign languages. So you can't order everything from the trait menu, and you sometimes can't order even one item without worrying about a bunch of others. Now the question is, do you care more about your kid's nose or her linguistic facility? And if there's any downside at all, should society let you choose?

The other problem is, the more nuanced your definition of a mental strength or virtue, the less likely you are to find consistent genetic correlates for it. So the tendency will be to design a standard that weeds out nuance. In the case of intelligence, you ask multiple-choice questions instead of essay questions. You eliminate from the test those subjects in which scientists can't agree on an objective standard. You're left with IQ, a decent predictor of professional success. You compare genomes and IQ scores and discover a strong link. In your scholarly journal article, you stipulate that IQ measures only one aspect of intelligence. But alert entrepreneurs are already hyping the story on TV. Expectant parents are lining up to get into pilot IQ gene "therapy" programs. The danger, it turns out, is not that these IQ genes will explain the subtlety of intelligence, but that they will replace it. •

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The case for re-regulating airlines.

PLANE TRUTH

By Robert Kuttner

Something has gone disastrously wrong with airline deregulation. Fares have been rising far faster than inflation. Most of the small, upstart airline companies launched in the early 1980s have gone broke or been gobbled up by big carriers. The top five airlines control more of the market (71 percent) than they did in 1977, the last year of the fully regulated regime. The turbulence of a free market has produced precisely the reconcentration and gouging that skeptics predicted.

Deregulation was supposed to bring a closer correspondence between costs and fares, but fares have become a crazy quilt. On routes with shared monopolies and many business travelers, like New York-Washington, the airlines charge an astronomical 50 to 60 cents per seat mile; their costs are about 11 cents. On comparable, highly competitive routes, fares drop dramatically. A one-way coach ticket from Oakland, California, to San Diego, 448 miles away, costs $49. A one-way Washington-Boston ticket, a 406-mile trip, costs $219.

Two passengers sitting next to each other can pay wildly different fares. A round-trip coach seat between Boston and Dallas, on short notice, costs $1,020. If you can risk a non-refundable, 14-day advance purchase ticket and stay over a Saturday night, the fare is $318. And despite the "free market," the fare is identical whether you take Delta or American.

Admittedly, there are often good economic reasons why the price should vary over time for a commodity. Airlines reward passengers who are willing to book early and risk a penalty, or to fly stand-by and bear the risk of delay. They understandably offer price inducements to attract passengers to fly at off-peak times when seats go begging, just as vendors offer steep discounts for day-old bread, overripe vegetables, rush tickets for concerts, and weekend hotel specials.

But nothing else comes close to the price bazaar of deregulated airlines. It seems patently unfair when Smith and Jones, seated in 22A and 22B, pay $1,020 and $318 for the same product. What's worse, airlines evidently have designed a byzantine pricing structure not mainly to attract the discretionary flyer, but to insulate themselves from price competition and make it possible to soak captive customers.

The airlines have invented several measures to thwart the free market environment of deregulation. These include: mergers (the time-tested way to neutralize a competitor is to buy it); frequent flyer gimmicks to train the customer to value mileage credits and brand loyalty over comparison shopping (with the customer's employer often footing the bill); airline-owned computer systems that offer the parent company instant intelligence on the pricing strategy of competitors and facilitate the use of kickbacks ("override commissions") to encourage travel agents to book passengers on the parent airline; ties between major carriers and commuter lines (which frustrate interairline competition); and a little-appreciated monster of route manipulation known as the hub-and-spoke system.

Hubs are a good place to begin, because they are so wonderfully misleading. With more people flying, one would expect greater economies of scale in the form of more wide-body planes and more non-stop flights. After all, a 747 can carry passengers coast to coast non-stop at far greater comfort and lower cost than a 727 making a stopover in Minneapolis or St. Louis. (The 747 flying 2,000 miles costs 3.7 cents per passenger mile to operate. The 727 making two shorter flights costs 5.2 cents per passenger mile plus the cost of the extra ground time, and must fly a greater distance to take a passenger to the same final point.) Yet under deregulation, there are relatively fewer non-stops and more retooled 727s, and passengers find increasingly that they must squeeze into a cramped plane and endure a time-consuming stopover at Pittsburgh, Charlotte, Denver, or some other hub. Since deregulation, hundreds of wide-bodies have been sold by U.S. carriers to foreign airlines, while the demand for short-hop 737s has soared.

Hubs have been touted as instruments of greater efficiency, flexibility, and choice. Supposedly, the new system of short hauls is a faithful reflection of consumer preference and entrepreneurial ingenuity newly liberated by the free market. But it is a dirty little secret that hubs—known in the industry as "fortress hubs"—are mainly a device for increasing market power. If TWA can dominate St. Louis, or Northwest/Republic monopolizes Minneapolis, or USAir/Piedmont controls Charlotte, and if an increasing fraction of flights are routed to require a stopover, then price competition is restricted and the airline is free to charge whatever the (rigged) market will bear.

A recent study by the General Accounting Office found that profits at "high concentration" hub airports

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(dominated by one or two airlines) were 27 percent higher than at competitive airports. TWA controls 82 percent of departures at St. Louis's Lambert Airport, flights that produce 20 cents per passenger mile. Delta flights originating at Atlanta, a hub dominated by two carriers, produce 27 cents per passenger mile, versus an average of 15 cents at a sample of 38 airports not dominated by one or two airlines. Between May 1985 and May 1988, the number of airports served by as many as four airlines dropped by 52 percent, while the number served by only one carrier increased by 25 percent.

In free market theory, United should look at TWA's supernormal St. Louis profits and enter the market, driving down fares and enhancing consumer choice. "Contestability theory" holds that competition doesn't require an actual competitor, but merely the threat of one. The economists who believe this should be sentenced to circling Lambert field until they get it right. You don't have to be a Ph.D. to appreciate that United stays out of TWA's St. Louis hub because TWA stays out of United's Denver hub, and both in turn avoid Northwest's Minneapolis hub; that way everybody makes a nice living.

But this outcome has real costs to both equity and efficiency. The most obvious is that some people and some cities get gouged. The last thing depressed Dallas needs are artificially high fares that dissuade business travelers from coming to call. Second, the hub-and-spoke system requires the nation to build more airports than it needs. Denver had to build a multibillion-dollar new airport, not because people are lined up to travel to Colorado, but because Denver has become a key United and Continental hub, a pure artifact of private regulation aimed at suppressing price competition.

The hub phenomenon also leads to a fascinating statistical aberration in the claims made for deregulation. You now fly more miles to get to the same place. For example, Boston-San Francisco direct is a distance of 2,429 miles. Via Dallas, the trip is 3,024 miles, and takes about four hours longer. This extra mileage is known in the business as "circuity." The statistics showing that air fares have dropped thanks to deregulation are based on actual passenger miles flown—which exceed what they ought to be. Actual costs, and hence fares, could be that much cheaper if deregulation hadn't demolished so many non-stops.

Some historical perspective: in 1887, Congress regulated the railroads because of a range of monopoly abuses, which included discriminatory pricing, kickbacks, predation, outright and shared monopolies, and price-gouging on short hauls (all of which neatly describes today's airline industry). At around the same time, the emerging economics of public utility regulation acknowledged that some industries did not lend themselves to the discipline of the marketplace. Inviting a second municipal electric company to build a power grid to discipline the first company made no economic sense. Candidates for public utility treatment typically had heavy sunk capital costs and economies of scale, involved public rights of way and public investments, and public interest overtones (water, electricity, local phone service, etc.). If efficient competition to discipline a public utility was not an option, the effective choice for organization of such industries was private regulation (usually in the form of a cartel or monopoly), ruinous competition, or acknowledgment of natural monopoly and regulation in the public interest.

The early experience of the airlines was similar. In the 1920s a series of "spoils conferences" divided up routes and rigged fares, with the blessing of the postmaster general, who was the airlines' biggest customer. In 1938 Congress formally regulated the airlines as quasi-public utilities. A new Civil Aeronautics Board treated the airlines as a regulated cartel, granting shared route monopolies and specifying fares. This security stabilized profits, and also limited them. It allowed airlines to invest in new generations of equipment, and despite regulation (or perhaps because of it), fares gradually dropped in real terms as planes became more efficient.

But there were plainly excesses. No new major carrier was allowed into the interstate airline business for 40 years. Fares on intrastate flights within Texas and California were a lot cheaper than on regulated interstate flights. As airlines seeking market share tried to substitute things like free champagne for price competition, regulation sometimes went to hilarious extremes. Delta, for example, filed a laborious complaint before the CAB against Northeast's promotion offering steaks "cooked to order" on its New York-Florida flights. Delta alleged that the steaks were cooked in advance, and merely reheated to order. This dispute consumed several months of solemn deliberation—and was abruptly mooted when Delta bought Northeast.

In the 1960s and 1970s a wave of research, relying both on new economic theory and on the Texas and California experiences, held that airlines were not, after all, natural monopolies requiring regulation as quasi-utilities, but were really naturally competitive. After all, their sunk capital was portable, and it could be bought and sold. In principle, a skyway was not like a pipeline; it could accommodate many new competitors. Bipartisan support for this view emerged in celebrated hearings conducted by Ted Kennedy's Senate Judiciary subcommittee. Critics held that the regulators invariably got captured by the regulated. An anti-business populism exemplified by Ralph Nader, who supported deregulation, combined with the pro-business populism of the economists, who foresaw a new day of entrepreneurial innovation, price competition, and cheap fares. This culminated in the Airline Deregulation Act of 1978, birthed by economist Alfred Kahn, who was Jimmy Carter's CAB chairman.

Economists predicted that new airline companies with lower costs and closer-to-the-market pricing strategies would drive down fares, and that monopoly pricing and inefficient labor and management practices would be competed away. They didn't anticipate the computer and the Reagan administration. Several upstart airlines entered the market, but the computer allowed the estab-

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lished carriers to match their discount prices on just enough seats to drive the upstart company's "load factor" (the fraction of seats filled) below the break-even point. That sounds a lot like predatory pricing, but the Reagan administration was dominated by antitrust theorists who believe, Chicago-fashion, that such a thing cannot exist. Moreover, the administration took an extremely liberal view of mergers, so that as the big carriers drove their new competitors toward bankruptcy, they were free to buy them out. By the mid-1980s the industry was in a frenzy of buy-or-be-bought, which led to the re-emergence of an airline cartel.

To appreciate that deregulation has misfired is not to be confident of the remedy. Many leading students of the problem, such as Michael Levine, dean of the Yale School of Management, initially an eager advocate of deregulation, now hold that airlines do not follow the naturally competitive behavior that was predicted. Much entrepreneurial energy has been directed at creating subtle barriers to competition. But Levine warns against a return to pre-1978 style route and fare regulation. Alfred Kahn, the architect of the present regime, says the main thing that undermined his scheme was the Reagan administration's failure to enforce the antitrust laws, and its slowness to build more airport capacity. Kahn continues to be a champion of deregulation.

Ted Harris, who heads a Washington-based airline consulting firm, is one of the few industry insiders who unequivocally favors reregulation. He argues that with expensive capital equipment the airlines really can't stand free price competition, and that deregulation spawned the cartelization that one would expect in an industry with characteristics of a natural monopoly. "The industry has forgone profits in the first years of deregulation to put itself in a shared monopoly that it is just now beginning to exploit," he says.

Airline policy could now go in one of two directions. Policy-makers could attempt to "perfect" deregulation by cracking down on predatory pricing, prohibiting large mergers, barring airlines from owning computer reservation systems, and requiring dominant carriers in monopoly hubs to give up gates to new competitors. Small airlines have bitterly protested the unavailability of gates, both at the four highly congested airports where the FAA limits them and at other airports such as St. Louis, where the dominant airline enjoys a contractual right to keep out potential competitors. Obviously, unless the economist's condition of free entry really applies, the idea of natural competition in the airlines is fantasy. Tougher antitrust would at least allow a fair test of the deregulation hypothesis.

Yet some critics argue that genuine, unfettered price competition is unrealistic, because it would render airlines unprofitable, leaving them even less money to maintain their planes or provide a market for a new generation of advanced equipment. "The only thing that saved the airlines from bankruptcy was the Reagan administration's failure to enforce the antitrust laws," says Harris. If that is true, Congress may wish to go back to the mood of 1975-76, when the sentiment was not for total deregulation, but for what was then called "regulatory reform."

For example, the FAA could set a "zone of reasonableness," with maximum and minimum fares on each route. It could calculate the rough demand for flights between particular cities, and allow enough carriers to assure consumer choice. When fares approached the high end of the zone, it could permit additional competitors to fly the route. The same computerization that allows airlines to subvert the free deregulated market also makes it far easier to regulate in the public interest. A reformed regulatory scheme would simplify the current fare structure, and even out the pattern of price cutting over here and gouging over there. That sort of regime would stabilize industry earnings, removing monopoly profits but leaving enough capital for the airlines to keep investing in more efficient equipment—which is ultimately the prime source of cheaper air travel. Congress, however, is unlikely to try on that set of wings just yet, since the prevailing mood still holds that regulation can do little that is right, and markets little that is wrong.

The great promise of deregulation was its populism. Its honeymoon phase made it possible for whole new classes of people to fly. Supposedly, critics of deregulation are simply elitists seeking lower fares and emptier skies for the business class. However, today's fares are a jumbled blend of vanishing bargains and skyway robbery—and the bargains don't always go to the deserving cases. When bleeding-heart liberals propose that society's less fortunate should pay on a sliding scale for medical treatment, housing, or child care, it is denounced as inefficient socialism. But when the free market dispenses $1,000 tickets with one invisible hand, and $300 tickets with the other, it is hailed as efficiently redistributive.

Economic analysis needs to concede that in monopolistic industries, entrepreneurial innovation is often aimed at complicating pricing and retarding consumer choice, rather than serving it; and that there are limits to the efficiencies gained from managing more cleverly, shaving maintenance costs, and hammering down wages. Ultimately, the task of carrying a passenger from point A to point B is a straightforward one. Over time, the surest efficiency gains are to be had from the development of more efficient planes. Deregulation doesn't necessarily serve that goal.

Here we have another good lesson in the hubris of standard economics. There is no such thing as a naturally free market. All markets are social constructs, anchored in law. Antitrust is as much a regulatory intervention as rate regulation. Nor, in the real world, is every posted price continuously renegotiable. Despite deregulation, the airline passenger cannot go up to a ticket counter with knowledge of load factors and offer to pay $19 for a seat to Seattle that would otherwise go begging. The airline business, it turns out, is not a flea market. •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Folk Lore and Joke Lore

Strange. **Comic Book Confidential** (Cinecom) is the first documentary, as far as I know, on its subject. Plenty of fiction films have been made from comic-book subjects, and probably films have been made about people who work in comics. But I'd have thought that, long ago, someone would have wanted to use film to talk about a medium that derives from film. Now comes this picture, which, briskly informative though it is, doesn't even mention the relation between itself, as film, and its subject.

For a couple of years in the early 1940s, I was a comic-book editor, and this relation was almost all that kept me interested: discussing the script with the artist who was to illustrate it, deciding which frames would be long shots, medium shots, two-shots, close-ups, and the angles for each—ways to get emphasis and variety just by choices for the frame. Jules Feiffer, who began his career in 1945 as a comic-book artist, said in *The Great Comic Book Heroes* (1965):

> Arguments raged: Should angle shots be used for their own sake or for the sake of furthering the story? Everyone went back to study *Citizen Kane*. Rumors spread that Welles, himself, had read and learned from comic books.

More likely it was the other way around; from Feiffer's account, it might be argued that some of the better comic-book artists were indirectly influenced by the directors who influenced Welles—among them, John Ford and the German expressionists.

Another point not made in *Comic Book Confidential* is the irrelevance of the medium's name. We're told by William M. Gaines that it all started in 1933 when his father stapled some newspaper funnies together, put them on newsstands, and saw them melt away. Soon there followed funnies produced especially for the newsstands, independent of newspapers. As Gaines Jr. took over, other kinds of subjects were used—by him and by others: action, fantasy, horror, and more. The majority were not comic, but they were all called comics, just as their cousins in the newspapers continued to be called funnies.

CBC was directed by a Canadian, Ron Mann, who makes a 90-minute run through the history of the field, mostly by means of interviews with people prominent in it. The film is divided into periods, with the period titles in comic-book lettering. Mann handles it all lightly but as a type of relevant social history, which in the course of time took on unexpected aspects.

For instance, in the 1960s comics seemed exactly the right medium for some counterculture artists, a means of expression that, by its very existence, flouted the marmoreal canons of the culture. Robert Crumb tells how, in those days, he left his greeting-card work in Cleveland, immigrated to Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco, and began the work for which he is now known. Latterly, other topics, including politics and feminism, have been used in comics by such women as Lynda Barry and Shary Flenniken.

The one comic book I still see once in a while is *Mad* (with offices on MADison Avenue). It was started in 1952 by Harvey Kurtzman, who is in the film, and it still has some satirical laughs in it. What it also has is some very good drawing, which hovers between realism and caricature. All of the good artists who work in comics, whether they do stories of the *Captain America* kind or the *Mad* kind, are better than they are generally assumed to be—clever and sleek in the first group, clever and clever in the second. But the public gets little chance to know this because of the color that is (usually) glopped onto the crisp black-and-white originals and the quality of paper on which the work is printed.

Mann includes a few clips of Frederic Wertham, the psychologist who, in the 1950s, warned against the effect on children of horror and violence comics. The fact that the republic still stands is no proof that Wertham was wrong. Perhaps those comics helped pave the way for ultraviolent horror films, violent video games, violent rock—all of which would probably have stricken Wertham dumb. But what Mann's film demonstrates, willy-nilly, is that there is always an appe-

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Dead Poets Society. *An echo of Vigo's* Zéro de conduite. *In a proper prep school a heterodox teacher, Robin Williams, stirs up his class with the works of great writers. A bit neat and predictable, but well made. (Reviewed 6/26/89)* **Do the Right Thing.** *Spike Lee's deceptively pleasant film, about a black block in Brooklyn, explodes toward the end. A warning? A threat? At any rate, not a fantasy. Lee, who is also in the film, has grown greatly as a director. (7/3/89)* **Lawrence of Arabia.** *Find some friends who think it's just Hollywood hoopla and persuade them to see it. Your reward is in listening to them later. (2/20/89)* **Little Vera.** *A Soviet domestic drama that takes* glasnost *to new heights. Truths about Soviet young people, their disaffection, their prospects, told with affecting skill. (5/1/89)* **—SK**

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tite for trash, particularly among youngsters, trash they can call their own; that the changes from the brutalities of ancient myth and Grimm into Superman and Captain Marvel are only the mastication of the past by the giant jaws of mass communication, chomping away for an increasing population. Possibly, worry about the matter is a waste of time. This is not to exalt trash but to bet on the eventual triumph of mature fantasies—such as sex and greed—over the fantasies of youth.

(Next week: *Batman.*)

Mark Twain said that if Adam came back, the only things he'd recognize would be the jokes. Bran Ferren's **Funny** (Original Cinema) proves this yet again—pleasantly.

Ferren's idea was simple: he invited several dozen people, usually one at a time, to sit down in front of a camera and tell their favorite jokes. Some of these people are well known—actors, writers, a film director—some are not. In no case is there a "spike" identifying the speaker: Ferren keeps the tags for the end. Some of the jokes are good. (Henny Youngman's one-liners, of course: "There's this near-sighted bandit . . . Says 'Stick 'em up. . . . . Are they up?' ") Some of them are not only pointless but shapeless. Some of them are old, and many more are old forms with new punch lines. A few of the jokes are so current that, quite unaware of one another, A and B and C told more or less the same story, and Ferren intercut the three versions.

A surprise is that the film is so interesting to look at. It consists mostly of people, nicely photographed, facing the camera. (One of the exceptions: a woman bartender, standing behind her bar, talking to us.) The succession of human figures, one after another, telling us something they hope will make us laugh, has the effect of a contemporary social gallery. Almost all, except the bartender who has some customers in sight, depend on the film crew for response. When none is forthcoming, Ferren slyly keeps the camera rolling long enough to show the letdown.

A film could hardly have a simpler premise, but it's based on an important phenomenon: the need for jokes in our lives. Freud's *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious*—which might also be called *Uncle Siggy's Jokebook: A Jest for Every Occasion*—emphasizes again and again that jokes are a means of making a statement economically. (Think of what is implied in "That was no lady, that was my wife.") Perhaps that's why, in a speeded-up age, jokes have become more and more of a social requisite.

Freud also says:

> Wherever wit is not a means to its end, i.e., harmless, it puts itself in the service of but two tendencies which may themselves be united under one viewpoint: it is either *hostile* wit serving as an aggression, satire, or defense, or it is *obscene* wit serving as a sexual exhibition.

Nothing in *Funny* contradicts this.

The Great Hesitator

BY HENRY FAIRLIE

Adlai Stevenson: His Life and Legacy by Porter McKeever

(Morrow, 591 pp., $25)

After the 20-year supremacy of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry Truman in the White House, Adlai Stevenson was not only the first Democratic presidential candidate to lose an election, he remains the only Democratic or Republican candidate since then to lose two presidential elections in succession. In the almost 40 years since Stevenson first ran against Eisenhower, the Republicans have won seven presidential elections, the Democrats three (three Republicans, but no Democrat, winning two consecutive terms).

Of course, one cannot trace all the continuing ailments of the Democrats to Stevenson. Yet he was the party's acclaimed national leader for almost a decade (he even sought the nomination for a third time in 1960), during a period of economic, social, and political transition with which the Democrats still seem incapable of coming to terms. Any student of his life and character must ask whether his long reign as its standard-bearer did not contribute, initially and lastingly, to the continuing weakness of the national Democratic Party (the state parties are doing very well).

Stevenson's character was complex, not reassuring in all respects, perhaps not even steady. A central question, in his personal and political life, is whether he was ever willing to do, within reasonable bounds, what was necessary to win. Since he died, there have been largely uncritical biographies by Kenneth S. Davis and by John Bartlow Martin and a favorable interpretive study by Herbert Muller. A quarter century after his death, we do not need a fourth valentine. Unfortunately, that is what Porter McKeever has given us.

McKeever's publishers tell us only that he was Stevenson's "close friend and U.N. colleague" and "national publicity director for the 1952 Stevenson campaign." But the entry in *Who's Who* shows that from 1945 to 1965, more or less the span of Stevenson's public life, McKeever was, under various titles, a public relations officer for six organizations, from the State Department to the Council on Foreign Relations and the Ford Foundation. In other words, McKeever was generally a hired spokesman for the postwar foreign policy establishment; and by birth, schooling, the inheritance of worldly goods, his network of friends and contacts, his marriage, and the course of his career, no man was more clearly a member of the establishment than Stevenson. The biographer wears the same blinkers as the subject.

"The Stevensons must have Chinese blood," Stevenson's wife said shortly before suing for a divorce. "They worship their ancestors." There was certainly the temptation: Adlai Stevenson II was born in 1900, the grandson of the vice president of that name in Cleveland's second administration. On both sides of his family he was descended from long lines of energetic, productive men and women whose own lives, from the time the first Stevenson settled in Pennsylvania in 1748, were always in step with the expansion of the new nation, not least the opening and rapid civilization of the Middle West.

His mother dominated family life as Stevenson grew up. She picked him up from school in her electric car to "rescue" him from his "rowdy" companions. In 1915, when Stevenson and his older sister Buffie went to camp in Maine, their mother stayed at a nearby inn to keep an eye on them. When he first went to Princeton, she cruelly rented a house there, and in his final semester at Princeton she took a house there again. Stevenson complained with increasing bitterness about her intrusions, but his protests, which even Buffie thought were "too tactful," never rose to the youthful

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rebellion that was needed—if only because, characteristically, he enjoyed the Tudor mansion his mother rented during his sophomore year as a social center for his friends and dates, and also the Hudson Super Six she brought with her.

Through his parents and his grandparents, Stevenson started with unusual access to a wide range of people of wealth and influence. While he was at Choate, his father moved to Washington to work for Josephus Daniels, the secretary of the Navy, and during his Christmas and spring vacations Stevenson was "placed on the 'sub-deb' social register list, and he and Buffie were included in a round of parties with the capital's elite." At Princeton, of course, the network of contacts widened; among them T. S. Matthews, later editor of *Time*, who described Stevenson then as "a slight, dark, nervously lively boy with a quick, lemony laugh."

When he joined the old Chicago law firm Cutting, Moore, and Sidley in 1926, Stevenson moved into an apartment on the Gold Coast and pursued "the opulent life offered to favored young bachelors." He was placed on "Miss Campbell's list," Miss Eliza Campbell being the social secretary employed by upper-crust mothers to recommend suitable names for their daughters' debutante parties. "It was . . . his nature to socialize," writes McKeever, and a friend from those days has recalled, "VIP-itis, both Ad and Buffie had it." Through the access he already enjoyed, Stevenson was at once welcomed into Chicago's wealthy and then buoyant elite. He was invited to join the important clubs in Chicago and Lake Forest, near which he later bought a farm at Libertyville. By his late 20s, he had a sure footing in the establishment. In 1928 he seemed to complete the picture by marrying the 18-year-old Ellen Borden, whose father had inherited a mining fortune and whose mother was a queen of Chicago society.

But Stevenson's life needed a direction. It was provided by Harriet Welling, the wife of one of the Chicagoans who befriended him, who introduced him to the leadership of the Council on Foreign Relations. That lofty body, identified by many as the core of the American establishment, was founded in Chicago in 1922 to support the League of Nations and to resist the prevailing isolationism of the Midwest, of which the *Chicago Tribune* was the most virulent and effective voice. Through the Council, Stevenson acquired what he once described as his "consuming interest in foreign affairs"; a persistent, if often woolly, internationalism; an unrivaled platform for the speeches and articles that advanced his reputation; and a still wider range of influential contacts within, or on the margins of, the fortresses of political power.

The Council's "large Saturday luncheons at the Palmer House became 'in' social events," and this rather smug mixture of politics and socializing with an elite more or less set the pattern of Stevenson's political life. There was nothing reprehensible in it. But it did mean that the main (if not the only) source of Stevenson's information and ideas was a dangerously limited, privileged, self-selected group of like-minded men and women, who were confident (like David Halberstam's "best and brightest") that they had been appointed in that hour to govern America and the world sanely and beneficently. It is important to understand that these people were generally honorable. They simply could not see how limiting their environment was. (George Ball was nine years younger than Stevenson, yet from the Palmer House days he encouraged and smoothed Stevenson's advance. At an Aspen seminar in the early 1970s, Ball said he did not believe there was such a thing as the establishment, provoking the immediate riposte: "Of course Mr. Ball cannot see the establishment, since he *is* the establishment," at which he rollicked with establishment laughter, the point running off him like rain over a pebble.)

The opportunity for such men came with the Second World War. As they moved into Washington, they could feel the awesome might of the United States at their fingertips. As Stevenson was to tell a Princeton class in 1955: "The power . . . of this American political organization [i.e., the United States] is virtually beyond measurement. . . . All this is to say that your power is virtually beyond measurement."

He had already done a brief stint in Washington at the beginning of the New Deal, and so was there in the heady atmosphere of the FDR "Brains Trust" and the bright young men who, like himself, streamed into the capital from the leading law schools. After returning to Chicago to assume his role (and golden opportunity) as president of the Council on Foreign Relations, Stevenson became chairman of the Chicago Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies in 1940. The following year, as America's entry into the war seemed more and more inevitable, he began making discreet inquires about interesting posts that might come open. The irresistible offer came from Frank Knox, the secretary of the Navy, one of the many energetic Republican products of Theodore Roosevelt's "New Nationalism," who fit naturally into the activism of the New Deal. He created for Stevenson the position of "principal attorney" in the Office of the Secretary, with the additional (and more accurate) title of special assistant to Knox.

Stevenson was again in the capital in an exhilarating atmosphere, as the administration organized the vast resources and manpower of the nation for a single clear objective with an unmatched efficiency. He quickly established his reputation in wartime officialdom (even FDR noticed him) and was picked for wider responsibilities. When Knox died, Stevenson returned to Illinois, and there displayed the irresolution that was later to cause so many misgivings about him. Some people on the *Chicago Daily News* asked him to form and head a syndicate to buy the paper from Knox's widow. There were wealthy and powerful backers, including Marshall Field, who offered to put up more cash if it was needed. But when the rival John Knight increased his bid to $15 a share, Stevenson did not feel justified in topping it, even though he had been authorized to go higher. He often lamented, typically, that the effort had not succeeded, as if it had not been his failure.

In the fall of 1944, Ball asked him to go to Paris to head the office of the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey there. By Christmas 1944 he was back in Illinois, and was later to make an impressive list of the relatively high and responsible posts in government he was offered in the following year. He eventually agreed to a proposal by Archibald MacLeish to join the State Department to "improve communications" between it and the American people, especially to rally support for America's membership at the United Nations. Stevenson's initial demurral seemed, as so often later in his life, to have been designed only to make the requests for his services more importunate.

He was now invited onto the public stage. In September 1945 Truman appointed him the deputy U.S. representative at the London meeting of the Preparatory Commission to plan the first session of the U.N. When Edward Stettinius, the secretary of state, was laid low with gallstones and resigned, Stevenson became the head of the American delegation. Later that year Truman appointed him an alternate delegate to the first General Assembly. In both positions he acquitted himself well. In 1946 he was back in Illinois, accepting political engagements there.

So far, so good. Approaching his prime of life, here was an intelligent, pre-

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sentable, honorable, decent man who had proved his capacity in several responsible positions, a man of property relieved of the diurnal worry of making his living, with no need to put his hand in the till, and now with contacts, as a result of his wartime activities, at the highest reaches of politics and the military. What could impede him? Yet a great deal of fretting accompanied the smooth progress.

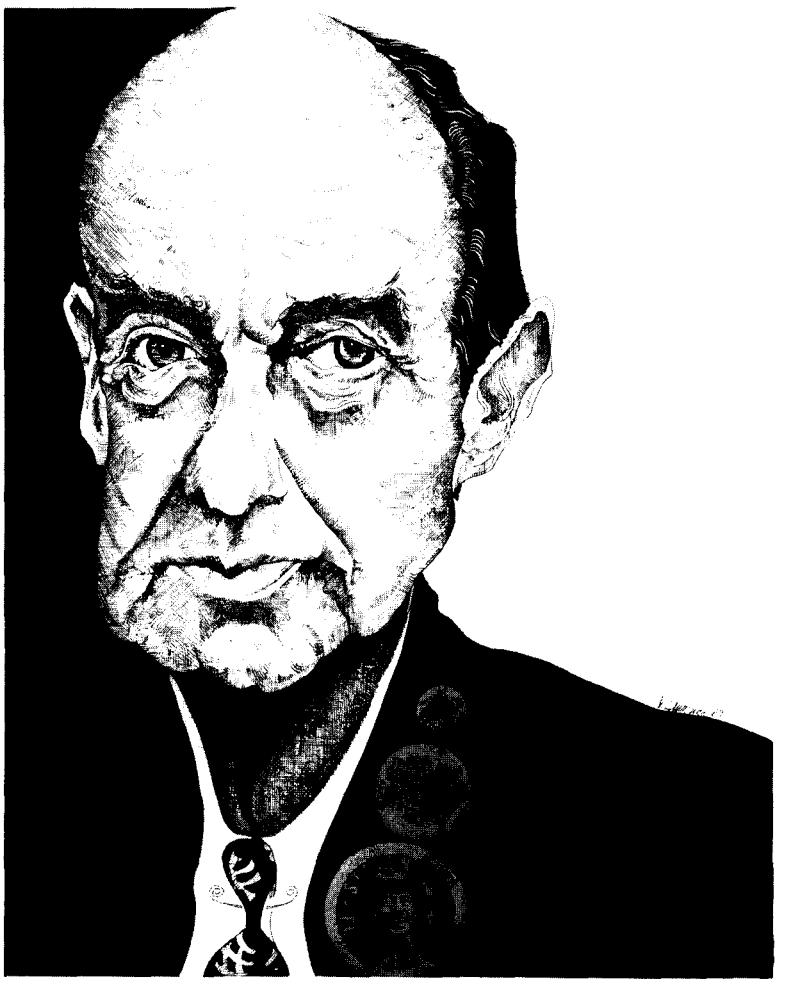
The entry in his diary on his 47th birthday could not be more revealing, in spite of his lifelong refusal to examine himself deeply or honestly:

> Am 47 today—still restless; dissatisfied with myself. What's the matter? Have everything. Wife, children, money, success—but not in the law profession. Too much ambition for public recognition; too scattered in interests. . . . Prospect of Senate nomination sustains & at the same time troubles, even frightens me. Wish I could at least get tranquil & make Ellen happy & do go[od] humble job at law.

In fact he did not do much to make Ellen happy, and he never had any intention of doing a "good humble job at law." But surely the main cause of the fretting was that his advance had never been a consequence of his own initiative, inspiration, passion, or even sure ambition.

Politicians can be like streetwalkers. They display their wares and wait for events to pick them up. The event that picked Stevenson up was nothing of his doing. It was the timely advance of the remarkable Col. "Jake" Arvey to the leadership of the Democratic machine in Cook County, Illinois, which had, like the party in general, just been battered in the 1946 midterm elections. Arvey was unlike the old machine bosses. He was a cultivated man, as shrewd and resolute as the old bosses, but aware that it was time for a change.

He may even have believed in honest government—up to a point—for its own sake. The New Deal had finally absorbed the mass immigration into the political mainstream. The wartime prosperity had set most of the working class on the road into the broad middle class of America, and the educational, housing, and other provisions in the GI Bill started the servicemen and their families on their trek from the inner cities to the suburbs. Democracies seduce their young men to fight by appealing to their idealism, and there was a prevailing mood that politics should be cleaner. Looking around for two convincing candidates to match the mood, Arvey fixed on Paul Douglas, who had returned from the Pacific a war hero, and the unstained Stevenson. As he said to Stevenson while pushing him to run for governor in 1948, "You're our showcase. If you do well, then we'll look good."



DRAWING BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Stevenson recognized that, although politics "fascinated" him, he "had never been in 'combat' politics." He dithered, straining Arvey's patience. Unable to reach Stevenson at one last-minute moment, Arvey would not have been pleased to learn that he was away at Princeton, attending a collegiate musical comedy performed by the Triangle Club—at the age of 47. Stevenson's unhealthy to-run-or-not-to-run attitude toward a nomination he knew was being fixed for him was expressed to a Chicago journalist: "I have never felt that [the governorship] was my 'dish' and still don't. However, perhaps I shouldn't be too emphatic and I won't be for the present." That deceiving air of aloofness and reluctance was to become an ingrained habit.

In the event, he won, in a landslide. Arvey had judged right. Enter the East Coast journalistic establishment: Krock, Lippmann, Reston, Childs, the rest. (Stevenson had always taken trouble with the press, in Chicago and then in Washington, and not least during his two missions to the early U.N.) Believing themselves to be birds of rare intelligence, they were flattered to see Stevenson in their own plumage: urbane, courteous, able to turn a phrase (even if it said nothing), with a patrician languor that lent the above-the-battle appearance of sacrifice, even of martyrdom, for the public good, and still with the "lemony laugh." Almost at once Krock wrote in the *New York Times* that Stevenson was in the running for the next presidential nomination, and as the 1952 Democratic convention approached, most of the others were lined up behind him.

Stevenson sought the presidency three times. His ambition for the office was unmistakable, and the show of reluctance was again only a fastidious demurring until he was approached as the one indispensable candidate. As he wrote to the wife of Thomas Finletter in 1960: "That I will accept a draft—yes—who wouldn't or couldn't." That was what he always wanted: a draft in some form, brought to him on a salver; a listless prophet waiting for a chariot to carry him heavenward.

McKeever does not record that on the evening of January 2, 1952, when Truman asked Stevenson to take the Democratic nomination, Stevenson said no. Nor that Arvey said later that Stevenson's casual answer had angered Truman: "He couldn't understand it. How a man could dillydally with such a thing like the presidential nomination." Nor how five years later, when the possibility of a third nomination was being canvassed, Truman recalled that in 1952 Stevenson had been "too busy making

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up his mind whether he had to go to the bathroom or not." Nor how on June 26, 1952, Stevenson wrote insufferably to Alicia Patterson, a strong-willed woman, daughter of the co-editor of the *Chicago Tribune* and founder of the *New York Daily News*, "If there's a touch of destiny about the draft business, then I will not thwart it."

But the true horror came in his acceptance speech. He had earlier asked Dorothy Fosdick, the daughter of the preacher Harry Emerson Fosdick and a colleague of Stevenson's at the U.N. meetings in London and San Francisco, to remind him of the words of Jesus in Matthew 26:39: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." Now, in accepting the nomination, Stevenson said: "I have asked the Merciful Father to let this cup pass from me. But from such dread responsibility one does not shrink in fear, self-interest, or in false humility." He then quoted the cry of Jesus before the agony of the Crucifixion, finally telling the convention, "Thy will be done." Watching the speech on television, Eisenhower snapped off the set at that point and said, "After hearing that, fellows, I think he's a *bigger* faker than the rest."

It was typical of Stevenson that he took positions on controversial issues that adhered so self-righteously to his own "principles" (as on the Taft-Hartley Act, upsetting the unions, or Israel, upsetting the Jews) that he drove away many of the vital elements that Roosevelt and Truman had held together in the New Deal-Fair Deal coalition—and with no sacrifice of essential principles on their parts. On one such occasion, when someone remonstrated that "if you insist on doing that, you can't win," Stevenson replied coldly, "I don't *have* to win."

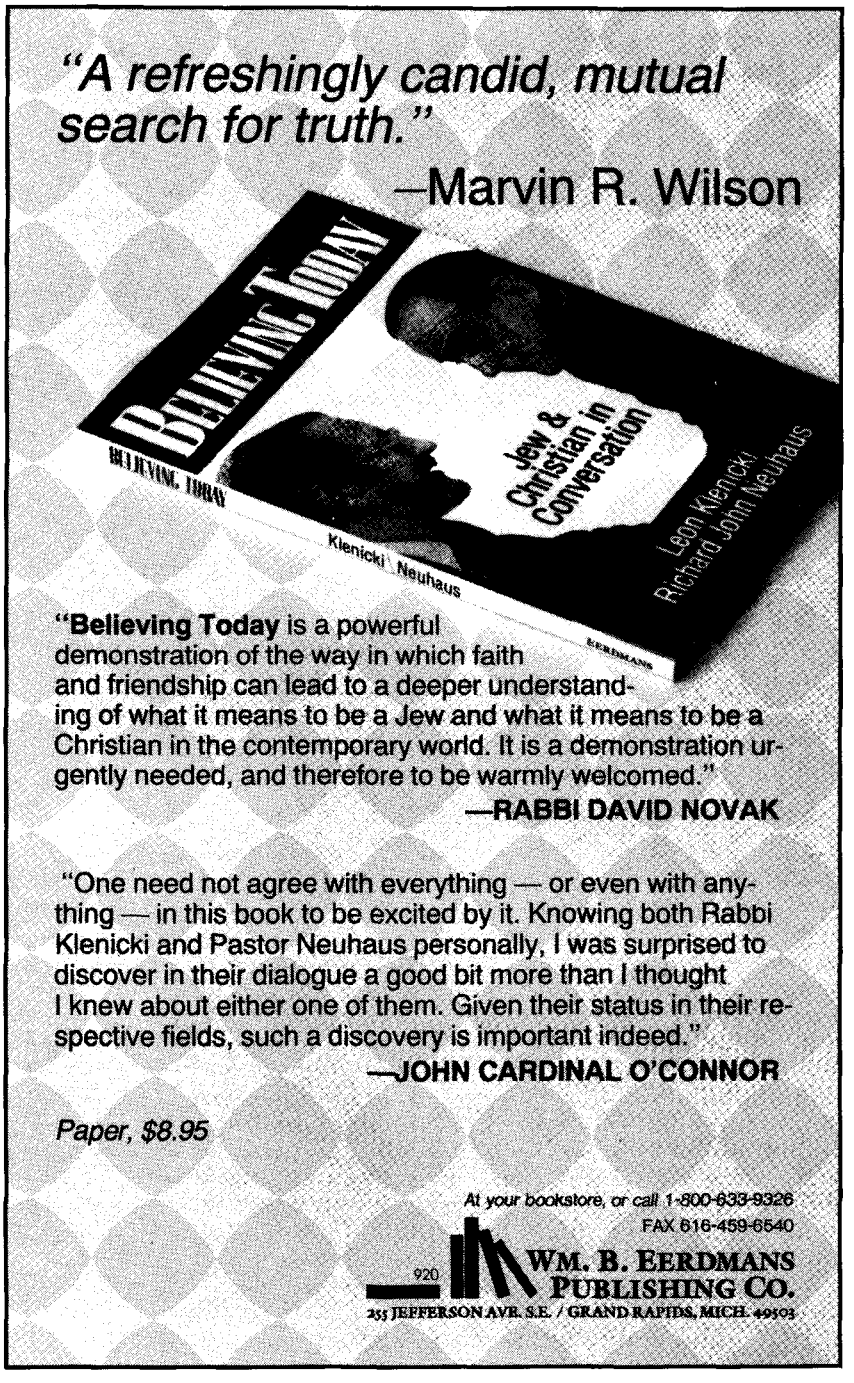
Eisenhower's victory in the Electoral College was crushing: 442 to 89. Stevenson carried only nine Southern or border states. In spite of this rejection, however, he was not a reluctant candidate in 1956. He was effectively campaigning from the fall of 1953, and during the midterm elections made 80 speeches in 33 days. But there was much of the same shilly-shallying. He was wisely advised to emphasize some strong local or regional issues to counter Eisenhower's immense national popularity, but he mocked such a strategy by describing how he "bitterly denounced the Japanese beetle and fearlessly attacked the Mediterranean fruit fly." That was the first year, moreover, in which primaries counted for much (though there were only 19 of them), but when told he must enter some primaries, Stevenson complained, "I'm not running for sheriff."

It was in response to his dithering (although he could, as is usual with such people, also be stubborn) that Agnes Meyer, the wife of the owner of the *Washington Post*, wrote him a carefully phrased but searching letter in 1955, chiding him for his "self-distrust," and for saying that "I wish I had a stronger heart for the work ahead." He had only to overcome, she said,

> a deep psychopathic fear of your own greatness and destiny. What the origins of this emotional block may be I do not know . . . , but . . . I have allowed the passionate and disinterested sympathy I feel for you to stream out towards you. For I realize that whatever my reason, my political training and my wide connections can do for you—all this is secondary to your own need for love and for a faith in you that is far stronger than your own.

She had put her finger, however delicately, on the main flaw, which Stevenson evaded in his reply: on his "need for *love and for a faith in you.*" In other words, his need to be stroked. Stroked by the party leaders, whom he forced to plead with him that he was indispensable; and stroked especially by his women friends.

Stevenson's mother was only the first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of the women he allowed to rule and confuse him all his life, even as he leaned on them. There was his sister Buffie, of whom he wrote, "She's a difficult person for me, . . . very possessive and self confident about what's right and wrong for me, but irrationally loyal and loving, and sensitive about me"; and there was a series of unsatisfactory relationships with generally rich, married, pushy women, whose weapon of domination was adoration.

He did not get the stroking from his wife. To anyone who has read of the marriage elsewhere, McKeever's account is spitefully one-sided, and even chauvinist. Ellen unquestionably was difficult, perhaps became even "disturbed" (the word recurs a lot). But we have passed the stage, I would have thought, when such "disturbance" in women is automatically attributed to some psychological disorder, and not seen to be the expression of a woman who felt her own inner needs and feelings neglected. The difficulties really only began when Stevenson returned to Washington, where she could not stand the self-importance of "those terrible people." Ten years younger than Stevenson, Ellen felt his fretting career taking him away from their farm and her. She divorced him a year after he became governor.

Agnes Meyer was "the most uninhibited in pushing him into consideration of his emotional life—a subject he usually avoided or diverted by humor," and in 1957 she wrote him a letter whose contents we can only guess from Stevenson's reply:

> I think you are right that I've been so busy most of my life with impersonal things, and still am, that I'm not a very fit candidate for marriage and probably never was. . . . But, madam! I protest again that 'mother's boy has in self-defense never loved anyone but himself.' He has, he does, love, really love, many people . . . on this exciting, fearful, beautiful journey we call life.

Stevenson's women friends took his side, of course, in the deteriorating marriage and the divorce. His relationships with them, at least in his expressions of his feelings, are often acutely embarrassing. He had a way of "falling in love," at least on paper, and then falling out of it—and readdressing the flowery if heartless letters to a new recipient. When Alicia Patterson informed him that she intended to divorce Harry Guggenheim, her third husband, Stevenson was "dismayed at the prospect," although a year or two before he had hoped for it, and he wrote her a "curious, confused letter advising her not to

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act impetuously." So it went on all his life, until Marietta Tree unsuccessfully gave him the kiss of life when he collapsed on a sidewalk near the American Embassy in London in 1965. It is not wrong to see in his relations with women the same refusal to make a clear commitment, to take the lead, as in politics. Lauren Bacall wrote of his "flirtatiousness," and there was something of this even in his fawning relationship with Eleanor Roosevelt, 16 years older than he, provoking another woman friend to suggest that he should marry her.

In spite of their disappointments in him, says McKeever, some of his women "referred to Stevenson as a 'life enhancer,'" and it was as a "life enhancer" that even those who were disappointed by his political performance justified his career and his national candidacies. He set great store by elevating public life and political debate through his speeches. This biography is spattered with praise for speeches that "remain a hallmark in American political history," and "undeniably the most lasting and the most important feature of his campaign[s]."

But neither one's own memory of the time, nor the reminder of them in the copious extracts in this volume, nor the few times one ever hears the speeches still quoted (except for a few fine witticisms), suggests that extravagant praise is justified. One has only to contrast the climactic speech of the 1952 campaign in Chicago Stadium, with its reiterated "I see an America . . . ," with Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" to understand why the one lives and the other does not.

In an introduction to a collection of his 1952 speeches, Stevenson said of them that "that's about the only aspect of the campaign I am sure of." The preparation of the speeches occupied a disproportionate amount of his own and his staff's energy. "We used to tell him," said Ball, "that he would rather write than be president." His insistence on continual revision meant that texts were often not ready ahead of time, so that reporters missed their deadlines; and if the speech was to be broadcast, there was no time to determine if the text fit the allotted time, so that vital concluding paragraphs were often cut off the air. But the main interest, as it was the main weakness, of the oratory was that he refused, or he was unable, to adapt his style to the more popular audiences he addressed. When the Alsop brothers invented the term "eggheads," he responded, attractively enough, "Eggheads of the world, Unite! You have nothing to use but your yolks!" But the speeches remained terminally egghead.

Speaking in the basement of a veterans' hall in the Midwest in 1952, for example, he talked of the "disingenuous dissemblings of the Eisenhower administration," a nice phrase that one might use with one's aunt. McKeever quotes at length the speech to the American Legion with which Stevenson opened his election campaign in 1952. The theme was patriotism—a reasonable choice, given the accusations against the Democratic Party in the prevailing climate of McCarthyism. The speech was wholly unexceptionable, but it was hopelessly abstract in its definition of patriotism. The speechmaker completely overlooked the fact (as did the most recent Democratic candidate last year) that to most people patriotism is represented by a few simple, virtually tangible, utterly legitimate symbols. You do not need to lecture the American Legion on patriotism. It is, indeed, condescending to do so. You don't put forward a "better" definition than their own. You show that you respond to the same springs of patriotism as they do. Roosevelt and Truman had no trouble showing that, and neither did Kennedy and Johnson.

In his "I see an America" speech, Stevenson concluded by speaking of "our design for the American cathedral," which is just not an American image, even for Catholics. In his "aversion to being a partisan for any special interest," he was unnecessarily cavalier with the anxieties of two groups, labor and farming, that Roosevelt and Truman had kept loyal to the Democrats. He then went to Fort Dodge, Iowa, and told his audience that "nobody is just a farmer . . . , or just a worker in a meat-packing plant. *The fragmentary man is a myth.*" (The italics were in the text.) The fragmentary man, in Fort Dodge!

So to whom did he appeal? His own and his admirers' constant justification of his oratory, of his political career, even of his defeats was that he brought into politics young, idealistic activists who otherwise would not have participated. As usual, Theodore White gave the orthodox view. "A generation of younger Americans . . . learned from him that American politics . . . could be made to represent the best in [American] life as well as the worst. . . . No man left a larger legacy." But his true legacy was George McGovern.

For who were these young, participatory Democrats? "The Stevenson phenomenon," Tom Morgan wrote exuberantly two decades later,

> would play back into the civil rights movement. . . . It would echo in the coming anti-war movement. . . . Not only did the Stevensonians give a hopeful start to the '60s in Los Angeles, but they also influenced a long, slow reformation of the Democratic Party by blacks (1964), youth (1969), peaceniks (1972), women (1976), Kennedyites (1980), and by blacks again, and Hispanics and gays as well (1984).

There, by and large, you have it; and from the excesses of that "reformation" the Democratic Party is still unsuccessfully trying to extricate itself.

The effect of Stevenson's influence was to exchange the substantial interests of men and women embedded in the common life of Americans for the interests of "minorities" who were alienated from it. He appealed not so much to liberal intellectuals, although they flocked to him, as to the newly affluent, upper-income, professional, literate (rather than intellectual) liberals of the 1950s and 1960s. There had been a harbinger of them, unmentioned by McKeever, at the very moment Stevenson entered politics in 1948, when a number of New York Democrats who lived in the Ninth District of Manhattan formed the Lexington Democratic Club. What might now seem only a local development was symbolically important, was of national significance. These Lexington Club Democrats liked to believe that their affluence and their position put them above the politics of patronage; that they were more interested in issues than in tactics; that by a combination of reason and grace of spirit they would regenerate the country and fit it for its mission. Their consciences were (and those of their successors remain) tender for losers, and envious of winners. McKeever says that in 1952 Stevenson began his "love affair" with New York; but it was with these Democrats, the precursors of what came to be called "radical chic." Many of them would rather have lost with him than won with Kennedy; and the late and apparently spontaneous "surge" of support for him at the convention was in fact incited by Stevenson's willingness to put himself at the head of an effort by the old guard to stop Kennedy.

But both the activists and the upper-income Democrats were, in truth, the alienated; and one must wonder, gazing on Adlai Stevenson's career and personal life, about his own alienation. The sad result was that this man who might have had much to give to politics in fact achieved so little. He awaited the kiss of life from his party, while persuading it to shed its traditional supporters in the mainstream, and the party, so misled, still awaits the kiss of life from the nation. •

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Dickinson's Children

BY CHRISTOPHER BENFEY

Unfinished Painting by Mary Jo Salter

(Knopf, 68 pp., $18.95)

Take Heart by Molly Peacock

(Random House, 71 pp., $16.95)

Twenty years ago an ambitious young poet was likely to get a hearing by publishing free verse stocked with boldly "concrete" imagery; a poet making the scene today is more likely to do so with a sheaf of sonnets, sestinas, and villanelles. Like the perennial return to figuration in painting or tonality in music, the well-publicized revival of metrical forms in recent poetry mixes marketing and nostalgia with some real, if often misunderstood, changes in aesthetic practice. Already the New Formalism, as the tendency has come to be called, is old enough to have fathered anthologies, taken over journals, and assumed its own (rather arrogant) critical tone.

The origins of the New Formalism are much debated, though it seems safe to say that it is a phenomenon of the 1980s. During the past ten years there has been a growing consensus among the most advanced American poets that the possibilities of autobiographical free verse—the dominant mode taught in creative writing programs during the 1960s and 1970s—are for the moment exhausted. The "language" poets of the West Coast—such as Michael Palmer and Lyn Hejinian—attack the notion of autobiography, challenging the determinant self with the indeterminacies of language. The (primarily East Coast) New Formalists experiment with verse more bound than free.

Perhaps the single most important influence on the New Formalists was the classroom practice of a few remarkable teachers. For example, a number of poets closely or loosely affiliated with the New Formalism—Brad Leithauser, Dana Gioia, Rachel Hadas, Robert Shaw, Mary Jo Salter—studied with Robert Fitzgerald at Harvard during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Fitzgerald's practice was to have his pupils master one form a week, and the sapphics, syllabics, hexameters, and Skeltonics in these poets' early books sometimes have the dutiful feel of the classroom.

In any case, the much noticed debuts of Brad Leithauser and Gjertrud Schnackenberg, in 1982, seemed to many readers to strike a new note in American poetry. Their poems tended to be elegant, skillfully rhymed and metered, and not at all "confessional." Like other New Formalists, they also shared a taste for the miniature and exquisite: "Don't abandon castles in the sand," Leithauser wrote. "Build them lower, closer to land." In a nation of poets that tends to trace its patrimony to Walt Whitman, these poets seemed to have come not from Whitman's expansive overcoat, but from Emily Dickinson's clean white dress.

Since a rubric like the New Formalism tends to obscure distinctions among poets who may have in common little more than an interest in rhyme and meter, I'd like to consider a couple of them in detail. Recent books by Mary Jo Salter and Molly Peacock approach formal problems from opposite directions, which might be referred to as form found and form imposed.

Mary Jo Salter's best poems examine a world already patterned. She is drawn to museums, churches, libraries—places where things of value are enshrined, encoded, under glass. The title poem of her first book, *Henry Purcell in Japan*, examined a country that seemed to her (as to such earlier visitors as Roland Barthes and Lafcadio Hearn) an empire of signs, each thing labeled and in place. Thus, at a Shinto funeral,

> Reading down,
> I felt as though the ashes of someone
> whose name ran vertically might lie
> differently, somehow, in the earth.

In her new book, *Unfinished Painting*, she peers into "a museum-case of obscure / Japanese bibelots" and finds that the English tags suggest a "tangible anecdote."

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The museum glass, in this and other poems, turns out to be a looking glass as well:

> As if that wordless, brimming wish
> to get everything said before
> we're dead might be fulfilled at last,
> they speak to us of a lost
>
> life we may have lived once, though
> it's daunting we should think so—
> for what could we have had in common
> with Seated Demon or Drunken Sprite?

Salter's rhyming tends to be unobtrusive, favoring such consonantal kinship as "last" and "lost" in the poem just quoted, or slant rhyme as when, in a poem about Emily Dickinson (the master of slanted light and rhyme), Salter visits the poet's bedroom, "winding up the stair / as if into her inner ear."

Even where people have not been there first to arrange and codify, Salter tends to see the world as though under glass. The exquisite "Spring Thaw in South Hadley" begins:

> Old snows locked under glass
> by last night's ice storm left
> curatorial Winter, in
> whose hands alone we'd hope
> to find the keys,
> jangling them in the trees—

The jangling of the words "keys" and "trees" is of course deliberate. More interesting than her use of rhyme, however, is Salter's muted and respectful use of American idiom, as in the conclusion of "Spring Thaw":

> A crash from Abbey Chapel—
>
> who cut the string
> that sent the white sheets falling?
> Nothing but the long
> scissors of the sun
> unwraps such thunder. Even
> a modest A-frame
>
> in a muffled instant sheds
> its wrinkling roofs of snow:
> black butterfly below.
> As if to make
> one more clean break above,
> the sky—seconds ago
>
> one continent of cloud—
> follows the drift of Spring,
> splits and refits like Ming
> porcelain. The plate
> tectonics alternate:
> white and blue, blue and white.

In these superb stanzas, the image of unwrapping a present is grafted to language suggesting resolution and independence, as Salter allows a richer than customary meaning to such unobtrusive phrases as "cut the string," "make a clean break," and "follow the drift."

In a world as formal as Salter's, the poet's instinct is to aim for an informal, casual tone, as though it's by chance that she's come across these particular patterns. Her favorite mood lies between sleep and waking, when what comes into focus is still weighted by the plumb line of dream. Poems of rumination like the fine "Reading Room" are perched in the liminal space of Frost's "After Apple-Picking" and Elizabeth Bishop's "The Moose." "Half, or more than half, asleep" in the library, she tries to get her bearings, as "the height and heft of the room come back; / darkly, the pitched ceiling falls / forward like a book." The sculpted female figures "jutting from the walls like gargoyles / or (more kindly) guardian angels" peer naggingly over her shoulder, while

> . . . Beneath
> lamps dangled from the
> angels' hands—
> stars to steer us who knows
> where—
> thousands of periodicals
> unfurl their thin, long-winded sails;
> back there, in the unlovely stacks,
> the books sleep cramped as sailors.

All Salter's skills are decked out in this passage: the casually confident deployment of the metaphor (borrowed perhaps from Dickinson's "There is no Frigate like a Book"); the wonderful discovery of "long-winded": the fine internal music of "*stars* to *steer*," "*thin*, long-*winded*," "*dangled* from the *angels*' hands."

Salter's world is reliably domestic, the generations comfortingly in place, the loss of parents balanced by the birth of children. Mourning, in the two long elegies included here, has its satisfying rituals. The splendid "Dead Letters" (originally published in these pages) concludes with a passage about tending a philodendron that draws on all the classical, If-Winter-comes-can-Spring-be-far-behind resources of the elegy, from the laurels of "Lycidas" to Whitman's lilacs.

Molly Peacock's resort to form is everywhere in stark contrast to Salter's. The very unreliability of Peacock's surrounding has drawn her to the regularities of meter and rhyme; form for her is less a graduated lens with which to view a patterned world than a fence to mark off expanses of chaos. In a recent symposium on the New Formalism, published in the journal *Crosscurrents*, Peacock has written that for many poets sonnets and villanelles seem too restrictive and "game-like" to be taken seriously, "destroying passion by regularizing it." "For me," she writes, "no order, no regularity, will ever be enough because I grew up in a situation where what was promised was rarely delivered." The household of alcoholic father and depressive mother that haunts all Peacock's poetry has given her a rage for order in which nothing is casually taken for granted, nothing safely under glass.

Peacock's last book, *Raw Heaven*, was remarkable for its bold exploration of terrain traditionally considered taboo—female masturbation; menstruation; the muck of the newborn and the stench of the newly dead ("I'm the kind of person who stops to look")—all fenced within the sonnet's elegant enclosure. Peacock's strength in her use of form is an awkwardness sufficiently authoritative that it reads as discomfort rather than ineptness; form in her poetry does not seem casually come upon but wrenched. In her new book, *Take Heart*, the taboo explored is child abuse and molestation. The best poems are bunched like a fist at the book's beginning, and deal with the death of Peacock's father. The poet is surprised that her emotion is more relief than grief, the "unexpected freedom"

The Darwin Decades

> They knew so much of what they could know
> in caricature. A dozen Amelias
> dwindled beneath the blush
> peignoirs of popular prose—
> and the great gardens of the Empire
> filling out to shade
> the public lawns. And in private studies
> and paintings, the milky tonnage
> of ice looming through the green
> gray oils and the sure laws of motion.
> Those were the periodic elements.
> From journal cartoon to opinion page
> that poor ape coming of age—
> becoming what he was, only a man
> pinned against a secular evidence.
>
> And what could be slowed by only a million
> words. Thousands of children
> (*For thame nevir mair wul I see*) never
> claiming the tactile dazzle of the material
> life. And letters without number
> stretched thin across a private means,
> and each began *My dearest one*—
> There was more, and so many
> famished behind the architecture of steam
> driven looms, ten thousand children nearly ten
> reciting "Edward, Edward"
> and biding their own anonymous time.

Kevin Cantwell

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she commemorates in one sonnet, whose ending, however, is deftly qualified:

> . . . The release
> is the fact that the dead stay dead, thank God, and
> you are free now to live until you die,
> nourished just by the fact that you're alive
> in the aftermath and now you rest in peace.

The ambiguous "now" makes one wonder whether the *requiescat in pace* applies to the living, as though we already have our epitaph.

Peacock's sonnets make no effort to conceal their rhymes and wrenched syntax. On the contrary, the elements of order are insistent, as when she describes what it felt like to wait for her father to leave a bar:

> . . . Outside, the wide
> endlessly horizontal vista raged
> with sun and snow: it was Buffalo, gleaming
> below Great Lakes. Behind bar blinds we were caged,
> some motes of sunlight cathedrally beaming.

Some readers will wince at rhymes as jangling as these, but Peacock knows what she's doing. She's willing to risk artificiality to achieve the impression of a forced imposition of form.

Peacock writes with harrowing specificity about what can happen when paternal love (as in *King Lear*) demands proof:

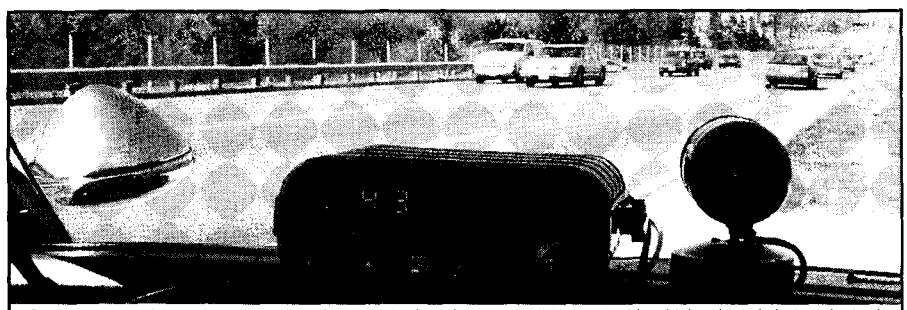
> What happened earlier I'm not sure of.
> Of course he was drunk, but often he was.
> His face looked like a ham on a hook above
> me—I was pinned to the chair because
> he'd hunkered over me with arms like jaws
> pried open by the chair arms. "Do you love
> me?" he began to sob. "Say you love me!"

The scene continues in implacable terza rima, this vision out of a domestic Hell as immediate as Dante's. Only a sister's invention of a phone call interrupts the scene: "No, the phone / was not ringing. There was no world out there, / so there we remained, completely alone." This is Peacock's strength, to suggest by the artifices of form a way of negotiating the chaos around her.

The New Formalism is so openly committed to self-imposed limits that it may seem silly to complain of them, like complaining about the dimensions of a baseball diamond. But perhaps once could profitably carp at the lack of daring in the forms chosen, which tend to be relentlessly highbrow. Salter has twice contributed to the recent profusion of villanelles (now that Bishop's "One Art" has freed the American ear from Dylan Thomas's hammering "Do not go gentle into that good night"), while Peacock has shown a reluctance to venture outside the sonnet's narrow rooms.

The results in both cases are distinguished, but they also exemplify a certain prejudice. One can safely say of the New Formalists as a group that they show little interest in American vernacular forms, such as the blues (exploited by Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown, and Jack Kerouac) or the ballad. They cultivate an immunity to pop culture; their language and sensibility seem, for example, at a great remove from the best rock lyrics. With regard to literary form, these poets' allegiance to Emily Dickinson seems misplaced, for Dickinson was a bold experimentalist in vernacular and popular forms, from sentimental verse to the Congregationalist hymnal. She avoided "high" forms like the plague, and wouldn't have been caught dead writing a sonnet.

This shying away from the expressive power of the moment makes one question the newness of the New Formalism. After all, the last great flowering of American formalist poetry, during the 1950s, was already self-consciously "new," a cal-



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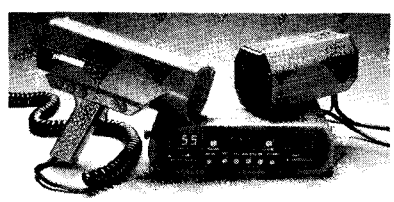

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culated rejection of the influential free verse of Williams and Pound. As early as 1948, Randall Jarrell referred to Robert Lowell's first book as "post-modern" in its insistence on housing contemporary experience in traditional forms.

The poets who came of age during the 1950s—Lowell and John Berryman, as well as slightly younger poets such as Richard Wilbur and Anthony Hecht—had a crucial advantage over poets writing today: they could rely on a sustaining and challenging literary criticism. (Thus Berryman called *Lord Weary's Castle* "the natural product of an elaborate, scrupulous, and respected literary criticism.") Such nourishing criticism is a casualty of the progressive academicization of literature. If today's use of inherited forms often seems less inventive, it may be because poets of the 1980s no longer have a literary criticism that opens up to them a useful vernacular tradition, the way the work of such critics as Yvor Winters, John Crowe Ransom, and Allen Tate challenged the poets of the 1950s.

The work of the New Formalists sometimes seems in consequence not so much post- as pre-modern, as though rhyme and meter had simply gone underground for a generation, and with a little care and watering could be made to flourish again. The poetry may yet flourish, though now the rows sometimes seem a bit too thin and straight. In the meantime, the New Formalists are writing some of the most interesting poems in the United States today, and for that we should be grateful.

CHRISTOPHER BENFEY, who teaches at Mount Holyoke College, is working on a study of Stephen Crane.

Solidarity's Second Coming

BY JANUSZ BUGAJSKI

Mad Dreams, Saving Graces
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by Michael T. Kaufman

(Random House, 288 pp., $19.95)

A few days after the imposition of martial law in December 1981, Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski's propaganda machine produced a Lech Walesa look-alike complete with walrus whiskers and lapel badges. They sat him at a table with military officers, Politburo members, and government officials, and tried to create the illusion that Solidarity's leaders had seen the error of their ways and were collaborating with the regime. Few were fooled by the spectacle, and the picture of Walesa and Solidarity abruptly disappeared from television screens and all further government pronouncements.

Seven years later the image of Walesa and Communist officials parlaying around the same table miraculously reappeared on Polish TV; in fact the vision monopolized prime-time viewing for two months. Only this time, or so it seems, the image is genuine. What happened in Poland during the interval between roundtables? Is the ostentatious display of concord between state and opposition for real, or simply another officially induced illusion?

Solidarity's emphatic parliamentary victory was certainly for real. And yet the opposition will have to abide by the roundtable agreements and remain a minority in the more important lower chamber. The Communist electoral trouncing, where even unopposed officials failed to gain sufficient first-round votes, was also for real. And yet the Party not only will retain its majority in Parliament, but will continue to control all important state institutions and coercive instruments.

Premature pronouncements about "power sharing" and an imminent transformation "from totalitarianism to democracy," therefore, must be treated with a degree of caution. Tentative steps toward pluralism and democracy may have been taken in Poland, but their direction has not been fully mapped out. The obstacles en route remain truly formidable.

Michael T. Kaufman's firsthand account of his experiences as the *New York Times* correspondent in Warsaw between 1984 and 1987 helps to distinguish some of the facts from much of the fiction surrounding the Polish imbroglio. Though Kaufman's book was completed before the recent crisis and does not discuss the significance of the Solidarity-Communist accord, it provides valuable insights into the underlying conflict of interest between state and society and sets the stage for the current phase of political struggle.

Kaufman's important observation centers on the capacity and stamina of public resistance to Communist policy in Poland—which of course precipitated the current agreement. Whether passive, clandestine, active, or overt, everyday resistance has penetrated practically all public and private activities. Martial law was ultimately unable to repeat what Soviet forces had accomplished in Budapest in 1956 and Prague in 1968, and the Warsaw authorities have had to seek more sophisticated ways of contending with this stubborn defiance while introducing desperately needed reforms to stimulate economic recovery.

The current Jaruzelski deal, involving Solidarity's re-legalization and an opening for independent candidates in the national Parliament, stems from several closely interconnected fears and needs. The regime is clearly worried about a potential tidal wave of strikes and demonstrations that would paralyze industry and necessitate another (ultimately counterproductive) crackdown. Government opinion polls indicate a growing militancy among workers under the age of 35, who constitute about 25 percent of the population and whose previously assumed aversion to violence can no longer be taken for granted.

In order to ensure that economic reforms are effective, Warsaw needs to implement a series of severe austerity measures by cutting back drastically on state subsidies to industry and consumers, and by raising the cost of essential food items this summer and fall. This will lower already precarious living standards, and it is sure to fan further resentment and hostility in the work force. The regime has tried to administer austerity without Solidarity in recent years and failed miserably. Workers have simply downed tools or threatened to strike, and quickly won pay raises from a petrified management; nearly 2,000 such strikes in various industries have been reported in the first quarter of this year. Officials are now hoping that Solidarity itself may sweeten the bitter pill of pauperization by explaining the economic imperatives of austerity to strike-prone workers.

Warsaw is also desperate for substantial material support from the West, including standby loans, interest payment relief, new credits, preferential trading arrangements, and fresh investments to

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help rescue the economy. Though the regime realizes that it cannot precipitate an immediate avalanche of aid (as the recent Bush administration package clearly demonstrated, making any new loans and investments conditional on further enactment of reforms), the political compromise with Solidarity was designed to unblock the pipeline and help ensure that the initial trickle of assistance could eventually turn into a steadier stream. Jaruzelski has already visited several Western capitals in the wake of the elections, and Bush's visit to Warsaw in July will presumably promote future Western aid and trade.

Still, Poland's most recent "historic agreement" has left many unanswered questions, and it could lead to renewed political battles. Will the authorities honor any or all of their concessions, or will they try to dilute and manipulate them in practice? Will the Communist bureaucrats obstruct and delay the political reforms just as they have successfully blocked necessary economic measures throughout this decade? Will there be a backlash from the staunchly anti-reformist factions who fear for their powers and privileges? Will they be able to forge a more coherent and organized challenge by manufacturing provocations and sabotaging the recent agreements?

Though the Party "soft-liners" seem to have the upper hand over the more orthodox "hard-liners," for the most part these are exactly the same cadres who imposed and supported martial law and its accompanying repression. Many Western commentators have unwittingly mistaken Communist reformers for social democrats and liberals, and have failed to scrutinize their programs and stated goals. These reformers are primarily people who realize that to survive and prosper, the Party has to adopt the most useful and beneficial features of capitalism and parliamentarism. But this does not mean it should surrender any crucial political or economic instruments of power, or the coercive levers that keep the "leading force" intact and in charge.

Reformers are a mixed bag of problem solvers, pragmatists, and technocrats who hope to use the democratic opposition to strengthen the economy without unduly disrupting or overhauling the political structure. The "Jaruzelski-Rakowski liberals" now appear willing to take the risk that the opposition will broaden and accelerate its demands for political liberties once ensconced in Parliament and on the factory floor. But in fact they are banking on limiting and whittling down oppositionist demands over an indeterminate period, while remaining acutely aware that a sudden retreat from liberalization amid deteriorating economic conditions would ignite social unrest.

With Moscow's blessing, the Warsaw and Budapest reformers are busy in their Leninist laboratories trying to concoct some new formula of state socialism. The potion is supposed to include just the right amounts of liberalization, restructuring, legalism, and co-optation, and it is supposed to be potent enough to extinguish popular unrest while stimulating economic recovery. But this pattern of official compromise in Poland is actually nothing new. As Kaufman points out, it dates back to the early years of de-Stalinization from 1956 onward, when the rulers sought ways of appeasing the hostile nation while preserving their grip on power. The Catholic Church was allowed full independence, and few religious restrictions were placed on clergymen. Agriculture was largely decollectivized to avert economic disaster and pacify the peasantry. Young people were permitted to enjoy and imitate Western music and fashion, as a distraction from political aspirations. And Poland remained relatively open to Western visitors, while its citizens were allowed to travel and maintain contact with their exiled families and friends.

Ruling Communist parties have also traditionally excelled in appropriating and manipulating the slogans of disgruntled social groups and the programs of their democratic opponents. The Polish United Workers Party is certainly no exception. Even the interior minister, Gen. Czeslaw Kiszczak, who supervises the infamous ZOMO riot police, the prison system, and the vast network of spies and informers, has now warmly embraced the "civic society" concept—a strategy pursued by dissidents over the past decade to involve citizens in a variety of independent pursuits.

But the qualifying adjectives may be all important here. Poland will now move toward a "socialist civic society," a "socialist parliamentary democracy," and a "socialist pluralism." Indeed, the precursor to Gorbachev's *perestroika* was Warsaw's "socialist renewal" (*odnowa*), a term pilfered from the opposition with the appropriate adjective added. It was designed to undercut public demands for democratic accountability by placing the Party at the forefront of the reform campaign and making sure that it was not dislodged from power. In fact, *odnowa* had two meanings in Polish: Party reformers used it to mean a Communist "revival" minus previous "errors and distortions," while the anti-Party opposition deliberately separated the syllables

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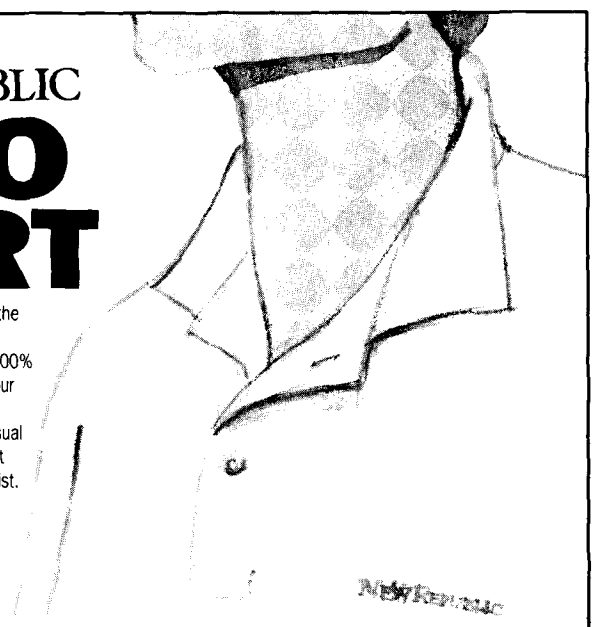

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(*od nowa*) to mean "from the beginning," minus Communist rule in toto.

Rather than resolving Poland's outstanding problems, the roundtable agreements and parliamentary elections may in practice produce fresh clashes between Party and opposition. Though the regime has apparently assured itself a sufficient proportion of seats in the lower house to block any major legislative or constitutional changes proposed by Solidarity, it may find it difficult to pass any new legislation without opposition approval or neutrality. Conversely, though Solidarity hopes to reanimate the previously servile lower chamber, it will have to be content with a 35 percent seat limit, and may not have sufficient influence over non-Solidarity candidates to repeal or pass controversial laws. The result could either be a paralyzing stalemate, a temporary compromise, or more likely a ferocious legislative battle.

The new upper house of Parliament (senate), though overwhelmingly dominated by the opposition, may not be in a position to resolve any impending conflict, and may assume the features of a pluralistic ornament rather than a vibrant democracy. Its veto powers over lower house decisions are to be restricted, while the prerogatives of the new presidency will be greatly enlarged. The likely president, Jaruzelski, will be vested with substantial powers: to dismiss both houses and call new elections, to propose and veto legislation, to reimpose martial law if conditions are deemed by the Politburo to be reaching breaking point.

In addition to all these technicalities, the guns and the tanks will of course remain in the same hands. Martial law, it must be remembered, was unconstitutionally declared in 1981 without even the facade of parliamentary procedure. Legalistic niceties rarely interfere with Politburo objectives, though they may help to attire them in democratic garb. The government has refused to consider any decrease in the security service, militia forces, and secret police apparatus, and it has not repealed any of the repressive laws passed by a compliant Parliament during and after the "state of war." Thus it appears that the Party has not decided to share power with genuinely independent political forces, but to share a part of Parliament.

Moreover, in its internal structure the Party remains a dictatorial pyramid irrespective of any tinkering with "democratic centralism." Warsaw leaders have taken precautions through purges and verification campaigns against any repetition of the 1981 "horizontalist" movement, in which local Party committees increasingly questioned or ignored central directives. Conversely, there does not appear to be any easily definable factional split within the Party leadership that could help democratize the organization.

In Poland and Hungary, Communist reformers now speak freely about "Finlandization" or "Austrianization." Indeed, they may dream of economic prosperity, social stability, and neutrality, but with one important proviso—that the Party continues to command the key instruments of power and supervises the reform process. Kaufman describes one comical instance of Party "liberals" posing as entrepreneurial trailblazers. Having consistently obstructed the registration of the independent Warsaw Association of Entrepreneurs, in 1987 officials suddenly announced the legalization of the "Entrepreneurial Association of Warsaw" headed by Politburo member and Prime Minister Mieczyslaw Rakowski. Poland's frustrated capitalists were more amused than angered by this brazen usurpation of reformist impulses by the political elite. According to one bemused businessman, "With its ersatz entrepreneurial committees the Party is claiming that its deciding role extends to establishing bourgeois and petit bourgeois institutions." In trying to gain the "best" of socialism and capitalism, the reformers may in reality end up with the worst of both worlds—continuing economic inefficiency combined with high unemployment and a widening gap between a rich minority and an impoverished majority of the populace.

Solidarity's parliamentary deputies have poignantly demonstrated their wariness of Communist reformers by declining offers of government seats and ministerial portfolios. Accepting the offices would be perceived by the public as a legitimation of the regime and a sellout to the Party. Moreover, the offers are viewed as a trap: the opposition could conceivably be allowed responsibility for agriculture, or industry and trade, but would then be blamed for the economic crisis a year down the road.

The role of Solidarity in the new political arrangements will be fraught with contradictions. As a labor union, Solidarity has to defend the interests of its rank and file; these include full employment, wage increases to keep pace with price rises, improved working conditions, and increased social security benefits. But as a political force and a "collaborator" with the regime, Solidarity has to push for economic changes that will include prolonged austerity, a scaling down of state subsidies to unprofitable industries, and even substantial unemployment.

If Solidarity acts strictly as a trade union it will be accused of sabotaging the reforms; but if it operates as a political force its leaders may lose the support of a large sector of the labor force. Workers will not easily accept a wage indexation scheme in which their living standards will continue to fall. It is here that the shrinking official unions hope to remain a thorn in Solidarity's side. Their populist, workerite stance is designed to cut some of the ground away from the independent union. They will remain useful for the Party in harrying Solidarity on its left flank and distracting its attention from wider political ambitions.

Warsaw hopes to capitalize on the divergencies and divisions within the dissent movement. The Polish opposition remains politically split between those who participated in the roundtable and those who either were deliberately excluded or voluntarily abstained. The absentees—including a section of the Solidarity leadership (styling itself as the "working group"), as well as a number of independent political parties, youth associations, and underground groupings—opposed the concord and the elections as an exercise in gullibility and manipulation.

They fear that any compromise with the "reds" leads inevitably to surrender: it endorses Communist domination, legitimizes the mock Parliament, demoralizes the public, and gives participants a stake in the system. These "absolutists" or "radicals" dismiss as futile attempts to reform the system "from within." Instead they argue that the Party itself must be replaced by a strong Parliament, not buttressed by a debating club with little real impact. Their rallying cry is "Down with the Commune," and it is now heard with increasing frequency during public demonstrations and other protestations.

Despite Solidarity's appeal, nearly 40 percent of the electorate nationwide boycotted the parliamentary ballot, and in some parts of the country, notably in the mining and heavy industry areas of Upper Silesia, the turnout was reportedly under 50 percent. A substantial percentage of the boycotters oppose the Solidarity compromise; their frustration and hostility could present severe challenges and dangers to both Walesa and Jaruzelski. By all accounts, a majority of Poles remain cynical and pessimistic about Poland's immediate future and deeply suspicious of any contracts with the regime. Kaufman describes his many encounters with the eminent dissident Adam Michnik, in which the latter berated him for his innocence and naïveté

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about the workings of communism and its seemingly endless capacity for intrigue and mendacity. Ironically, this is precisely the charge that some Poles are now leveling at Michnik and the other Solidarity advisers who warmly shook hands and cracked jokes with their former jailers across the roundtable.

Communist leaders will evidently accept some slippage of their monopolistic controls, but they do not necessarily envisage an evolutionary progression toward a multiparty, Western-style democracy. By contrast, Solidarity visualizes its support for parliamentary balloting as only a transitory step toward fully democratic elections and political pluralism. But even some roundtable participants remain skeptical about the final outcome, about the chances of averting a social eruption. After the televised agreements, Walesa himself pointed out that the country has already lived through 45 years of "beautiful words and lofty declarations" with few positive achievements. Liberalization and concession have invariably been followed by repression and coercion when the Party felt emboldened or endangered, or when thunderclouds blew in from the East. Solidarity's second coming may be a breath of much needed fresh air in Eastern Europe, but it may prove insufficient to clear the thickly polluted political and economic climate.

JANUSZ BUGAJSKI, a fellow in East European Studies at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, has just coauthored *East European Fault Lines: Dissent, Opposition, and Social Activism* (Westview).

Taming the Monster

BY RICHARD OVERY

Göring: a Biography by David Irving

(Morrow, 573 pp., $22.95)

The bulky figure of Hermann Göring has flitted in and out of half a dozen books by David Irving. Now at last he has a book all to himself. It hardly does him justice. Göring was a complex man, a very large feature of the political landscape of the Third Reich, a man of fascinating paradoxes who has remained curiously elusive for historians. Irving's new biography adds almost nothing to our understanding of him, though it includes, as ever, new documents.

Irving resurrects the popular, legendary Göring, the drug-addicted sybarite whose great joys in life were hunting, interior design, and dressing up. The Göring of his account was a simple-minded but utterly loyal careerist who used Hitler as an avenue to a life of sordid opulence. Irving sums him up in the phrase Göring is alleged to have used to his captors in 1945: "I've had a good run for my money." A good run, Irving might have added, with other people's money.

The nearest Irving comes to any serious assessment of his personality or achievements—the well-worn argument that Göring survived only because of an indestructible personal loyalty to his Führer—takes less than a page. Everything else is superficial. Göring's decision to join Hitler in the first place is covered in one very brief paragraph: "Goddammit, thought Göring, that's the stuff, he enlisted in Hitler's new party the next day." When Göring was put in charge of the German economy, Irving's only comment in the face of the enormously complex task his hero faced was that he "soon got the hang of things." The curious reader will search in vain for any analysis of motives, personality, historical significance, political style. It is not evident from Irving's life that Göring really made any difference to the Third Reich.

The current view, however, is that Göring mattered a great deal. Three recent books have succeeded in constructing a new history of Göring, first as a key figure in the period of Nazi consolidation of power; then as a roving ambassador pursuing a foreign policy of his own; finally as the architect of German war preparations and the dominant figure in German economic life in the early stages of the war, when Nazi efforts to control industry and the military finally faltered. Irving makes only the scantest reference to them. Göring's role as head of the German air force has been thoroughly

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assessed. Irving does not even seem to be aware of some of this work. His bibliography is strong on memoirs, weak on history (several key references, among them Horst Boog's and Williamson Murray's pioneering studies of the Luftwaffe, are absent altogether). Irving is, of course, entitled to read what he likes. But he cannot have it both ways. He cannot parade his academic apparatus and chide the profession for their omissions, and then ignore the academic discourse so blatantly.

Where there is no evidence, Irving cheerfully makes it up: "he must have known," "he was dreaming that," "every evening he was thinking about . . ." The style is atrocious, brief paragraphs liberally sprinkled with jarring metaphors and feeble descriptions. Take Irving's opening scene of the first meeting between Hitler and Göring: "Two planets pass, so close that each is fractionally deflected by the other's course. So it is, sometimes, with humans." Or his invocation of the sybarite: "a manicured mountain of perfumed flesh." (At one point we even find ourselves "beneath the moaning pines.") A breathtaking number of characters dash in and out of breathless prose.

In fairness, the second part of the book is markedly better than the first, almost as though the biography had been written by two people; the prose is less rushed and overworked, and less corny. But the bulk of even this section is all familiar stuff, drawn from Irving's very much better books on Field Marshals Milch and Rommel, and his history of Hitler's war. Irving is distinctly more at home with the military history, but all the recycled material gives the book a tired face. Irving, too, has had a good run for his money.

At appropriate points in the text Irving inserts his one arguably valuable contribution, the new documents that are his justification for another Göring life. Irving is not modest about his discoveries, trumpeting them at length (and announcing at the end of the book that they are now available to scholars in, no less, the David Irving microfilm collection at the Institute of Contemporary History in Munich). Some of the documents are worthwhile, in particular the diaries of Walther Darré, Herbert Backe, and Lt. Gen. Hoffman von Waldau, made available to Irving for the first time. Yet in the case of Göring, there is a real gap between the claims and the reality.

The new documents tell us very little that we did not already know. The prize discoveries—a cache of Göring's first wife's letters from the 1920s, a hunting diary from the 1930s, a section of Göring's desk diary from short periods of the war, the letters written just before his suicide—are either of little historical significance or are not used to full effect. Carin Göring's letters are hailed as "illuminating," but Irving fails to tell us what they illuminate (except for Carin's vicious, unremitting anti-Semitism). The desk diaries show a busy man, but not much else. The hunting diary is about as revealing as Chamberlain's bird-watching or Churchill's painting, hardly hot news.

Other documentary sources are scoured to give the "authentic" version. Irving claims that the papers of Werner von Fritsch, the German general forced to resign on charges of homosexuality in spring 1938, at last show the real course of the crisis. They do no such thing; Fritsch was almost the last person to guess what was going on, and his blind trust in Göring was a hopeless misjudgment. In another chapter Irving promises to "reveal" the attempt by Göring to alert the British to Barbarossa in June 1941. Apart from its fundamental implausibility, the evidence Irving cites is brief and circumstantial at best, and Göring's motives unproved.

To do him justice, Irving does not put in very much of what others have discovered. But the effect is to leave large parts of the story untold or poorly documented. Göring's role in German foreign policy, in the economy, in the war effort, and in the New Order are glossed over or paraphrased. While this gives us a continuous narrative, it begs endless questions. If Irving had matched his writing to his successful detective work, this would have been a much better book.

The text is littered with errors. Some simply repeat the standard mistakes. The four-engined bomber was not scrapped in Germany in 1936, but new specifications were laid down for a higher-performance model (the ill-fated Heinkel He 177, which actually features later in Irving's tale). Others are simply misleading. Göring's aristocratic friends did not help to create a "snowball" of support for the Nazis; the movement was a populist party rooted in small town and village, often hostile to the German upper classes. Göring did not hand over the Gestapo to Himmler in 1934 in return for eliminating Röhm. Goebbels did not arrange the pogrom in November 1938 as a way of saying thank you to Göring for patching up his marital problems; and so on.

Some of the errors are schoolboy howlers. There was no "Anglo-French alliance" in 1938 to aid the Czechs. Danzig was not a "Polish-German condominium," but a Free City under the League of Nations. Hans Lammers did not "head the cabinet," Hitler did. The German air force did not destroy 60,000 bombers by September 1943, but only 20,000 throughout the whole war. Some are the result of sloppiness. Paul Pleiger, manager of the Hermann Göring works, was not a "coal-baron," but a small-time producer whose resentment against the real coal-barons turned him to Göring in the first place. It was not Krupp but Ernest Poensgen and Albert Vögler of the Vereinigte Stahlwerke who led the resistance to state schemes for industry in 1937. Molotov did not demand "Romania and Bulgaria" when he visited Berlin in November 1940. Some are glaring contradictions. On one page Hitler's view of Austria is as a "tedious foreplay"; a few pages later the *Anschluss* is Hitler's "happiest moment." On one page Göring is about to win back "air supremacy" for Germany in early 1945 (a ludicrous view); a few pages later we learn that German "flying operations virtually halted."

This is not mere nit-picking. The inaccuracies and distortions betray a book written in a hurry, in which the history matters only to the extent that it keeps the story going. In two important cases, though, the distortions matter a very great deal, because they show Irving's underlying desire to see Göring in a way that reduces his responsibility for the criminal regime in which he was a central character. Irving insists that it was morphine, malignant dictator of Göring's personality, that was ultimately responsible for the catalog of brutality that the Allies laid at Göring's door in 1946. Second, Irving insists, as he did earlier in *Hitler's War*, that Hitler and Göring did not order the excesses of Nazi anti-Semitism; that the Holocaust was the result of overenthusiastic subordinates and the opportunities opened up by vicious warfare in eastern Europe.

It is no secret that Göring was on morphine in the 1920s to help him recover from the wound received in the Beer Hall Putsch, and that he ended up in Swedish sanatoria to get over the drug. But Irving claims that this addiction, according to "pharmaceutical textbooks," produces in the victim all kinds of delusions, a "grotesque vanity," periods of great energy, and intervals of sleepy languor—enough to turn an honest man untrustworthy. The implication is clear: without morphine Göring might have been a different man, honest, straightforward, responsible, conscientious, modest.

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The problem is not only that Göring was clearly a romantic, volatile, embittered veteran before he took the morphine, but that there is hardly any evidence to suggest that he went back on the drug again in the 1930s. Nor does Irving return to the charge throughout the rest of the story, bar the occasional innuendo. The doctors at Nuremberg found him addicted to pill-popping small doses of paracodeine (my pharmaceutical textbook tells me this is good for toothaches). The poor health and evident drowsiness can be easily explained as the result of depression and overwork, and of the battering of good living Göring gave to his body. (In a wonderful account of a lunch with Göring in his memoirs, the American journalist William Bayles testified to his coarse, voluptuous appetites.) But to excuse Göring's ambition, greed, unscrupulousness, brutality, bullying, lack of moral discretion, artfulness, and sheer survival instinct as the effect of morphine is to carry the rejection of individual responsibility to absurd lengths.

Irving's view of Göring's anti-Semitism is even more distorted. He seizes the opportunity to recapitulate his claims that the top leadership neither knew of nor approved the Final Solution. He makes no secret of Göring's record in the 1930s, when he put himself in charge of the harrowing Aryanization of the German, and later European, economies. Göring was directly responsible for driving Jewish businessmen abroad, expropriating their assets, buying up Jewish-owned stock at rock-bottom prices, encouraging the expulsion of Jews from all the management boards of German enterprises. When Vienna fell into German clutches, Göring applauded the vigorous "cleansing" of the city.

Nor does Irving deny that it was Göring who gave Reinhard Heydrich the directive to find a final solution to the Jewish question in July 1941. But he argues that the directive was only a permissive instruction, which Heydrich and the radical racists then interpreted as they liked, and that Göring's anti-Semitism was only cosmetic, designed to keep him in with Hitler. And throughout the book, Irving argues that the British, and Churchill in particular, practiced their own genocide, their "deviltry" as he calls it, through the bombing of German cities. This is another rehearsal of the now fashionable, but thoroughly dishonest, argument among German revisionists that one crime equals another, that bombing is equivalent to genocide, which is equivalent to Stalin's terror.

The central point about Hitler's responsibility has been thoroughly dealt with by Gerald Fleming in his *Hitler and the Final Solution*. But the question of Göring's anti-Semitism is more complex. Irving innocently reproduces evidence of Göring's deep hostility to the Jews in the new materials he presents on the 1920s, a hostility that predates the meeting with Hitler, and that he shared with his rabidly anti-Semitic first wife, Carin. His anti-Semitic activities have a particularly odious flavor; if he lacked the obsessive racism of the radicals, still he pillaged Jewish communities without scruple, stole Jewish possessions, drove Jews into poverty, and profited corruptly and massively from their decline. His cynical manipulation of the campaign against the Jews betrays a man divorced form any shred of moral sense at all. His second wife shared in the debasement. Jews that she helped to "escape" had to pay with a gold plate, which took its place alongside Göring's own loot at the country palace, Carinhall. And Göring showed no remorse at Nuremberg. Irving's claim that this kind of anti-Semitism was widely current in Europe in the 1930s is unconvincing; Göring manifestly transcended the popular prejudices of his day, in ways that invite our disgust.

Irving's long final treatment of Nuremberg emphasizes the theme running through much of the text: that Göring was basically a decent, loyal German, warped by morphine, Hitler, and good living. "This lion of a man" recovered, according to Irving, his manhood at the trial. He was once again the honest soldier of his youth; freed from morphine he became fit, alert, an agile defendant, a natural leader of the sorry pack of second-rankers dredged up for punishment. Here was the man who had urged Hitler to seek the path of peace, not war; the man who still urged on the feeble residue of German patriotism; the brave husband and father.

The pathos is a device. It is there to blunt our judgment of Göring, to forget that he was a man of driving ambition who stooped to any means, however corrupt or criminal, to maintain power; who endorsed the persecution of a whole race; who did nothing to alleviate the slave-labor program; whose personal greed provoked the looting of all Europe. "I have no conscience," Göring once declared, "Adolf Hitler is my conscience." He was Faust; Hitler was Mephistopheles.

RICHARD OVERY teaches at King's College, London, and is the author of *Göring: The "Iron Man"* and *The Air War 1939-1945* (Routledge, Chapman and Hall).

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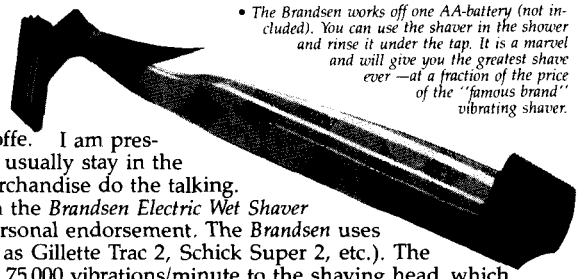

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Me, Myself, and I

BY GARY KRIST

My Secret History by Paul Theroux

(Putnam, 511 pp., $21.95)

My Secret History, an enormous book of over 500 pages, belongs to an increasingly familiar genre of American fiction—the novel by a rich and famous writer about the life and loves of a similarly rich and famous writer. Such books have apparently become required rites of passage for many of our major authors on the road to serious celebrity. But Paul Theroux, in his 18th book of fiction, has managed to avoid most of the pitfalls of the genre. *My Secret History* is neither a self-congratulatory account of the tribulations of success nor a study of the writer as victim of his demanding, bovine public. Rather, it's what autobiographical fiction ought to be: a writer's stratagem for getting at the larger issues raised by his own life. The fact that Theroux's life involves plenty of interesting sex in exotic foreign climes ensures that this novel, like everything he writes, entertains even as it gathers weight.

Of course, writers are always telling us that books like this are less autobiographical than readers like to think. They are, however, invariably more autobiographical than writers like to let on. So, after the de rigueur disclaimer in the author's note, Theroux proceeds to introduce a character who is outwardly as similar to his creator as Nathan Zuckerman is to his. Andre Parent, like Theroux, is the product of a Catholic boyhood in Massachusetts; after college, he travels to Nyasaland (now Malawi) as a Peace Corps volunteer teacher, later moving to a school in Uganda. He leaves Africa, as Theroux did, after an incident in which he and his wife are attacked by a Ugandan mob. He becomes a writer in London, writes best-selling books about long train journeys, achieves wealth and fame, and ultimately becomes bicontinental, dividing his time and his toothbrushes between London and Cape Cod. Just about the only step in Theroux's life that Andre Parent does not repeat is publishing a long autobiographical novel about a writer with a French-sounding surname.

But those are the public events of Parent's life, and what most interests Theroux about his protagonist is his private life—or rather, his private lives. Very early on, Parent discovers the appeal of leading an independent existence (the secret history of the title) distinct from the one he presents to the world. That life is invariably, and energetically, erotic. As a young boy, for instance, he alternates between serving as an altar boy at a local Catholic church and fondling a girl (a half-Jewish girl, at that) in a quarry called the Sandpits. The next chapter finds Parent, now a college student on summer vacation, leading two more secret lives—one as the amorous pursuer of a bookstore clerk named Lucy and a second as the companion of a much older, much richer, and much more neurotic woman, Mrs. Mamalujian. When both encounters end badly, he retreats to Africa, where he again picks up the habit. He's a mild-mannered teacher of English by day, and a tireless lover of local African teenagers by night.

By this point in the novel, it has already become clear that Theroux has a familiar conceit in mind—the double life—and he uses it to shape the entire book. In fact, he clings to this formula so tenaciously in the following chapters that it begins to seem less like an intrinsic characteristic of Andre Parent and more like a clumsy structural device of Paul Theroux. "That was the way it went," Parent writes during a London episode in which he is shuttling between life as a guest of noted writer S. Prasad (read V. S. Naipaul) and a secret love affair with an Englishwoman named Rosamond. "I spent my days with Prasad and my nights with Rosamond, one life turning within the other, and both spinning within me." And some 30 pages later, in a different context:

> I was not sure whether these different women . . . were more important and truer to the world than any of the stuff I wrote. Anyway, I suppressed it and kept it as my secret and so it was like a parallel history in private.

And 150 pages after that: "I was living two lives, and I knew I was a slightly different person with each woman. . . ."

This kind of recurrent motif, although it lends a sense of unity to what might otherwise be a rather diffuse story, at the same time threatens to give *My Secret History* an unfortunate flavor of textbook fiction. The reader is constantly tempted to frame an answer to that old test question: "Which of the following best describes the author's main idea?" One of Theroux's problems in the past *has* been his tendency to worry a concept—a theme or character trait or literary device—to within an inch of its life (remember Allie Fox's incessant harangues from *Mosquito Coast*, or the repeated connections of contamination and life, insulation and death, in *O-Zone*).

But Theroux is skillful enough here to prevent his theme from becoming overly mechanical or perfunctory. For one thing, his characters are much too vital to allow themselves to be subordinated to a literary device. Theroux excels at creating memorably idiosyncratic people—a troubled priest who plans boating excursions in the confessional, an insecure Indian tour guide who never stops talking, a Ghanian government functionary who has mastered the art of the perfectly insincere compliment.

More important, Theroux succeeds for the simple reason that he keeps amplifying the meaning and significance of Parent's erotic life as his character develops over the course of the novel. At times, his secret history is a retreat: a reflex of weakness, a way of escape, a substitute for engagement in any sphere. Later, it's a sort of game. In one excellent section, when Parent is living in Malawi during the interregnum between British rule and independence, the secret life becomes a rebellion of sorts, a way of living without labels. Parent, floating between incarnations as innocuous school director and oversexed, hard-drinking denizen of the African demimonde, enjoys the ultimate freedom. Like Malawi itself, he is an entity liberated from the confines of definition, a fugitive from what Theroux seems to regard as the imprisonment of identity.

In the last two chapters, Parent's peculiar mode of existence swerves in an unexpected direction, when he discovers that Jenny, his English wife, has been doing a bit of double living of her own. She takes a lover while Parent is off riding trains in Siberia, and when Parent finds out about it, he (with characteristic hypocrisy) loses control. He takes his revenge physically on the lover (in the most excruciating and hilarious scene in the book), but internalizes his revenge on Jenny. Finding himself in "a truer, colder, more imprisoning Siberia than the one I had left," he banishes himself

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to an upstairs room, where he can write and mull over his pain in private. Jenny's affair "was my secret, and not revealing it was the source of my strength. I saw that I had lived my whole life that way, drawing energy from secrecy, and feeding my imagination on what I kept hidden."

The chapter ends with a chastened Parent vowing to live a single-barreled life. ("Life could be so simple, and was happiest at its simplest.") But one of Parent's most endearing traits is his inability to learn from his mistakes, and the final chapter opens with him shuttling between his wife in London and yet another new lover in Cape Cod. In a nimbly achieved episode, he takes both women on separate but identical trips to India, observing their reactions and his own reactions to them. And he has a realization: "I saw there was a third person. He was the observer, the witness to all this . . . , the one who stood aside and made the notes and wrote the books."

And so *My Secret History* becomes, finally, and somewhat disappointingly, a portrait of the artist as a middle-aged man. Andre Parent the writer joins Parent the public person and Parent the secret lover in that single, crowded identity. But he isn't an altogether welcome addition, there since he turns out to be that old self-important pill—the writer as uninvolved outsider. And that third person takes over the book in its last pages. Parent distances himself more and more from his own life. He begins to direct his passions inward; the world around him becomes something to be watched and tested rather than engaged.

This definition of the writer is common enough, but it often comes perilously close to a definition of the writer as moral imbecile. Writers too often let their status as observers excuse them from the responsibilities of participation in the world they observe. Parent certainly does; he seems blissfully unaware of the consequences of his amorous double life for anyone but himself. And it's not entirely clear whether Theroux is presenting Parent for our approval or our censure. Theroux, after all, is the man who once boasted (in *People* magazine, of all places): "My life is a paragon of non-involvement."

But there are indications throughout that Theroux is more sensitive to the moral dimensions of Parent's secret history than Parent is himself. He presents some of the more repugnant by-products—messy abortions, betrayed trusts—of his character's supposed non-involvement. And when he shows Parent, a man who has tasted the humiliation of being cheated on, blithely embarking on yet another adulterous affair in the last chapter, he draws a necessary line between himself and his creation. For Andre Parent could not have written *My Secret History*. The detachment he cultivates, far from granting him a larger perspective, deprives him of the empathy required to realize that his erotic experiments are not conducted in a vacuum. And that absence of imagination ultimately makes him less interesting as a character.

It is this same empathy that Theroux demonstrates so convincingly in most of his fiction. Although his travel books have been criticized (not always unjustly) for their author's bad-tempered detachment from the people and places he encounters, his novels typically rise above that kind of limiting misanthropy. Theroux may have trouble doing justice to the complexity and worth of the characters he meets on railway trains, but he seems to have no such problem with the ones he imagines. *My Secret History* proves again that Theroux's world is a more complicated place when his imaginative sympathies, not just his powers of observation, are engaged.

GARY KRIST's collection of stories, *The Garden State* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich), recently won the Sue Kaufman Prize for First Fiction.

CORRESPONDENCE *continued from page 2*

that he does address, he seeks to mislead the reader. The facts remain that: Gary Sick may have written a *Post* article, but not on June 2, 1986, as Taheri cited; publication dates aside, there still was no June 6, 1980, issue of the *Jomhuri Islami*; the *Sunday Times* of October 12, 1980, contains three reports on Iran—two by Taheri—and neither contains the information he says he found there; the information that Taheri, in his book, attributes to Bakhtiar's memoirs and to the Rafizadeh document simply do not turn up in these sources. Such examples are legion. Many were mentioned in the review. Many were not.

Taheri's attempt to seek refuge for his inaccuracies by claiming that he and I used different editions of publications is similarly a red herring. I used the editions that he cites, and his citations prove wrong or nonexistent. I said not that Taheri should identify the dozens of people he claims to have interviewed, but that the lapses in accuracy in those sources that can be checked inspire little confidence in his reliability.

I wished in my review to focus on the reliability of his book, which is the issue, rather than on our personal relationship. Even here he fails to be accurate. Taheri's claim that I have attacked him through "back-biting, rumor-mongering, and gossip," for over 20 years no less, is simply untrue; Taheri has occupied far less of my attention than he flatters himself in believing. Typically, he gets my nationality wrong. Taheri attempts to cast aspersions on my knowledge of things Iranian. The soundness and reliability of my knowledge of Iran will, no doubt, be judged on the basis of my writings and scholarship; Taheri's reliability must be judged on his.

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Unreal Estate

RAISE YOUR HAND IF YOU'RE planning to run out and buy your own High Definition TV set the day they come out. What's it going to do, explain Gary Shandling's jokes? The real joke is that Bush, Mosbacher, and Brady are bringing America what no Democrat ever could: industrial policy. They're beating up on the Japanese (all the while keeping up U.S. trade barriers in areas like steel), letting IBM and its competitors set up production cartels to make semiconductors, and, in general, doing the picking and choosing—deciding what industries are "good" for America. Like High Definition TV, an oxymoron if there ever was one.

NEARLY TEN YEARS AGO, I WROTE an article for TNR called "The Middle House Under House Arrest." Real estate fever was sweeping the country, and I tried to make the case against it. The bubble is going to burst, I warned. Rent. I advised members of the "real estate class," the folks who "jabber constantly about real estate to keep their spirits up," to sell now, at the top of the market, and to consider themselves "very lucky rather than very smart—as though [they] had won six or seven times in a row at the roulette table." Rereading the piece, I'm struck by how quaint the numbers sound. But the amazing thing is: I was right! Or almost. The bubble hasn't burst (except in places like New Orleans, where you can buy huge St. Charles Avenue mansions for a pittance), but real estate has not been such a terrific investment. For instance, in the article I wrote that the average price of a single-family home in the Dupont Circle area of Washington was $64,000 in 1975 and $200,000 in 1979. My contention was that this couldn't last, and it hasn't: In the first quarter of 1989, according to Rufus S. Lusk & Son, the average price of a Dupont Circle house was $204,000. In Foggy Bottom, which is near the State Department, the averages were $69,000 in 1975, $156,000 in 1979, and $247,000 in 1989. Overall, the median price for a house in the United States was $55,700 in 1979 and $93,100 in 1989, the National Association of Realtors tells me; that's roughly the same rate of increase the consumer price index has had. In Foggy Bottom, the rate of real estate appreciation was 126 percent between 1975 and 1979 and just 58 percent between 1979 and 1989. Meanwhile, the Dow Jones industrial average has risen from about 900 to about 2500—nearly tripling—over the past ten years. And that doesn't even include dividends, which average about three percent. Think of it this way: if you bought a $200,000 house in Foggy Bottom in 1979, it would be worth $316,000 today. But if you brought $200,000 worth of stock in 1979, it would be worth $556,000 today—and you'd have another $68,000 in dividend income. Of course, since our tax system is rigged to get people to buy houses rather than invest in the productive sector of the economy, the numbers ultimately wouldn't be so gorgeous. The other problem is that you can leverage yourself like crazy to buy a house and get an 80 or a 90 percent mortgage. So, on that $200,000 real estate investment in Foggy Bottom, you might have put up only $20,000 cash, which makes $116,000 look like a very attractive return on your investment. Still, stocks appreciate faster than real estate; they always have, and they always will. The reason is that a share of stock is a piece of a company in which minds are producing value. Real estate just sits there. Its value depends on the vagaries of taste and tax laws. Now, the embarrassing part of this story: I didn't take my own advice. I didn't keep renting. I bought a house in Chevy Chase, and, yeah, it turned out to be a good "investment"—though I never bought it for that reason. Honest.

MY NEW HERO IN THE SENATE is Gordon Humphrey. People laugh at Gordo, this right-wing recluse, a former airline pilot who spends his days in his Senate hideaway with earphones on, looking at computer terminals. Earlier this year, he decided not to run for reelection in New Hampshire, even though he would have won easily. He doesn't believe in permanent legislators, and, unlike Nancy Kassebaum, who professed the same principle 12 years ago, he's acting on it. But what made Humphrey a hero was that he was one of only three senators to vote against the ridiculous anti-flag-burning resolution the Senate passed the other day. A conservative Republican, he joined Senators Ted Kennedy and Howard Metzenbaum, an odd trio. "What defines desecration?" said Humphrey during the debate. "It seems to me it is an endless riddle. No one likes desecration, but this just seems to me an exercise in silliness and even a little bit of hypocrisy. I am going to vote against it knowing full well that all kinds of things will rain down on my head. But, frankly, it strikes me as intellectually dishonest, and I just cannot live with it." Perhaps the senator is giving us a shining example of the considerable merits of lame-duckism. If a guy isn't running for reelection, he doesn't have to pander. But, then, he really doesn't have to pander anyway. It's not that hard to get reelected, we've noticed.

THIS DIARIST WAS DELAYED IN transit. The other day I went up to New York. I usually take the train, but I decided to try out the Trump Shuttle, wanting to see how different it was from the Eastern Shuttle (and also admittedly somewhat covetous of 4,000 bonus miles). It turned out that it was no different at all, except that Donald Trump's picture was on the cover of the in-flight magazine and the corned beef sandwich was pretty good. I pressed my luck, however, and decided to fly Trump again on the way back to Washington. We sat on the runway at La Guardia to wait out a passing thunderstorm. As lighting crackled all around, the flight attendant assured anxious passengers that the storm would be no problem since the plane "flies so fast it goes right through it." But we didn't take off. The wait went on so long that the flight finally was canceled; the Boeing 727 wouldn't be able to make it to Washington in time to beat the 11 p.m. curfew for noisy planes. I managed to find a later plane, a TWA flight from JFK, one of those jets with muffled engines that is allowed to land after 11 p.m.; it too was delayed, and I didn't get home until 2 a.m. Still, I found something pleasant in all of this disruption. Those of us who ply the Boston-New York-Washington corridor have little adventure in our lives, and we take what we can find.

IN ANY CASE, THE TRAUMAS OF flying are nothing compared with those you experience on the road. A few weeks ago I drove up to Vermont all alone to pick up my daughter at school and bring her, her ferret, and her stuff (a whole station wagon full) home for the summer. I bought some of those mindless books on audiotape to keep myself from falling asleep—Tom Clancy's *The Cardinal of the Kremlin*, boiled down to three hours, with Darren McGavin reading all the parts (the women, too, in a falsetto). But not even Tom Clancy (like Gordon Humphrey, another right-winger gone soft, in this case on Gorby) could relieve the tedium and the hard, metallic tension of the drive. I stopped for a hot dog on the New Jersey Turnpike and remembered that Phil Ochs line: "The Howard Johnson's food is made of fear." And it wasn't even a Howard Johnson's.

JAMES K. GLASSMAN

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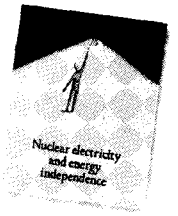

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